Gender Disruption, Rivalry, and Same-Sex Desire in the Work of Victorian Women Writers

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Abstract

This thesis examines the important role of female same-sex relationships in nineteenth-century literature and culture. Whilst drawing directly upon Sharon Marcus's recent book, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*, a revisionary queer reading of inter-dependent same-sex female intimacy and mainstream middle-class heteronormative ideals, my own study extends the parameters of Marcus's work by focussing on alternative contexts and previously overlooked same-sex female relationships. This thesis argues that the culturally endorsed model of Victorian female homosociality identified by Marcus was subject to disruption and transformation both within and beyond the institutions of marriage and the family. It concludes that various forms (rather than one definitive model) of homosocial desire shaped nineteenth-century female bonding. In the first chapter I explore the unstable social status of working middle-class women, and identify instances of employer/employee female intimacy organised upon a disturbance or reversal of social hierarchy. In the second chapter I demonstrate how the ideal of female amity was inevitably undermined in the literary marketplace, and that whilst women writers were engaged in constructing and disseminating this ideal in their novels, they were also embroiled in a series of professional jealousies with one another which served to undo the very ideal they were promoting. In the second part of this chapter I highlight the pluralism of mainstream homoerotic femininity by examining Dinah Mulock Craik's fictional representation of homoerotic surveillance manifest in a culturally endorsed adolescent female gaze. In the third chapter I challenge Marcus's claim that well-known independent nineteenth-century lesbians were fully accommodated into mainstream 'respectable' society by demonstrating that some of these women informed Eliza Lynn Linton's homophobic portrait of radical feminist separatism. I also explore in this chapter Linton's fictional representation of sororal eroticism, and argue that (notwithstanding mother/daughter bonds) Linton, like many of her contemporaries, regarded sisterhood as *the* primary bond between women. I also evidence in this chapter that Linton's portrait of 'sororophobia' is comparable with cultural ideals regarding the important function that female friends had in facilitating one another's marriage.

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Introduction

I

This thesis engages with an important area of critical enquiry, the role of same-sex bonds in nineteenth-century literature and culture. The topic of women's intimate bonds with other women can be said to have been inaugurated properly by Caroll Smith-Rosenberg's 1975 study 'The Female World of Love and Ritual'.[1] Demonstrating a commitment to the 1970s feminist agenda of recovering the lost histories of women's lives, Rosenberg placed lifewriting at the heart of her study and argued that intensely erotic (and possibly sexual) bonds between women were comfortably accommodated by middle-class patriarchal society. Although distinctly modified, Rosenberg's principal claim was upheld six years later by Lillian Faderman's *Surpassing the Love of Men*.[2] Like Rosenberg, Fadermen argued that prior to the advent of medical and sexological discourses, during the 1890s, a variety of intimate bonds between women were able to flourish unhindered within the predominantly heteronormative culture of the nineteenth century. Whilst Faderman differed from Rosenberg by claiming that these bonds were culturally accepted because they were considered asexual, each scholar, in their own readings, presented the nineteenth century as a "golden age" for women's same-sex intimacy. The concept of a 'presexological utopia', however, has long since been displaced. By the 1990s critics had begun to suggest that the 'acceptability' of women's romantic and erotically charged friendships had been 'exaggerated'.[3] Both Martha Vicinus and Marylynne Diggs, for example, argued that by the first quarter of the nineteenth century, a variety of discourses (inclusive of, but not limited to, medicine or science) had emerged and already begun to construct exclusive and primary relationships between women as disruptive and potentially deviant. Up until recently, these arguments have remained relatively uncontested. Martha Vicinus, for example, has recently consolidated her earlier claims by arguing that women's same-sex

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[1] Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, 'The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America', *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Autumn, 1975), pp. 1-29.

[2] Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1981).

[3] Martha Vicinus, '"They Wonder to Which Sex I Belong": The Historical Roots of the Modern Lesbian Identity', *Feminist Studies*, Vol.18, No.3 (Autumn 1992), pp. 467-497, p. 483; Vicinus's claims were subsequently supported by Marylynne Diggs, 'Romantic Friends or a "Different Race of Creatures"? The Representation of Lesbian Pathology in Nineteenth-Century America', in *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 21, No.2 (Summer 1995), pp. 317-340.

relationships were at best uncomfortably accommodated by a Victorian society uneasy about their association with a sexually anarchic (pre-revolutionary) French aristocracy, and the potential threat they posed to the already crisis-ridden institution of heterosexual marriage.[4]

Sharon Marcus's recent study *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (2007), however, represents a significant intervention into the analysis of Victorian women's same-sex relationships which liberates our extant understanding of these bonds from debates that have become stifled by the prevailing paradigms of marginalisation and transgression. Rather than being considered as transgressive and deviant, or displaced into a 'female world of love' that compensated women for the emotional deficits brought about by living in a society founded upon separately gendered spheres, Marcus argues instead that female same-sex bonds were endorsed as integral components of hegemonic heteronormative Victorian society. To support this (overarching) claim, Marcus explores in turn (and each as distinct) women's social, erotic and sexual relationships with other women to forward three persuasive arguments. In the first section of her study, Marcus examines an extensive range of women's lifewriting, situated alongside her reading of canonical novels and the conduct literature of Sarah Ellis, to suggest that female friendship was not only exalted in its own right by Victorians but also functioned as an important facilitator of companionate heterosexual marriage, with which it coexisted harmoniously. In the second section of her study Marcus offers a comparative analysis of Victorian pornography, periodical debates about birching, children's doll literature and female consumer culture to argue that fashion iconography not only promoted women's interests in a desirable femininity that was valued for its importance to the heterosexual economy, but also incited homoerotic practices of female aggression, objectification and display. Rather than being considered subversive, these practices, Marcus suggests, were regarded by Victorians as acting in consort with ideals relating to middle-class women's roles as wives and mothers, and therefore normative. In the final section of *Between Women*, Marcus examines the lives of a number of prominent Victorian women whose longstanding sexual relationships with other women, she argues, were

[4] Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friends: Women who Loved Women, 1778-1928* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. xviii.

not only comfortably accommodated by respectable society but also provided models for the reformation of hierarchical and indissoluble heterosexual marriage. Marcus's extensive analysis of a wide range of sources, combined with attentive, innovative readings of those sources, thus leads her to conclude that female amity 'was at the heart of the hallowed middle-class institutions of marriage and family', whilst 'female marriage […] and women's erotic fantasies about women were at the heart of normative institutions and discourses'.[5]

II

Although informed by an established field of queer theory and similar, feminist orientated historical studies, primarily my own analysis of Victorian female homosocial desire, is framed within a direct response to Sharon Marcus's *Between Women*. As will become evident throughout my thesis, however, rather than being limited to the status of a critical secondary source, Marcus's *Between Women* has effectively been afforded the position of a primary text within my research. Understandably, the decision to bestow such a level of prominence upon a single study is perhaps likely to prompt concerns that the ultimate findings of my research will be flawed by a wilful narrowing of engagement with extant critical commentary. It therefore becomes incumbent upon me to justify this decision by signalling and demonstrating the importance that *Between Women* has in revising contemporary concepts of Victorian women's same-sex relationships.

III

Arguably *Between Women* could be regarded as a reinstatement of Caroll Smith-Rosenberg's and Lillian Faderman's analysis of the nineteenth century as a "golden age" in which a variety of same-sex female bonds were allowed to flourish unhindered. Like Marcus, both Faderman and Smith-Rosenberg have claimed that, prior to the advent of sexological and psychoanalytical discourses, same-sex female intimacy was regarded as normative and fully endorsed by middle-class Victorian society. Faderman, for instance, presupposing Marcus's claims, had argued that middle and upper-class women could, with impunity, form intense and

[5] Sharon Marcus, *Between Women, Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 72, 13. All further references will be given in the body of the text following the initials 'BW'.

'unrestrained' bonds of affection with other women, or establish lifelong partnerships that were 'indistinguishable from […] marriage'.[6] Underlying and facilitating the social acceptance of these female bonds, according to Faderman however, were the cultural conceptions of female asexuality. The eighteenth-century notion that reputable (genteel) women were 'sexually dormant', which was consolidated by an internalisation of dominant proscriptions against heterosexual female agency during the nineteenth century, she claims, constructed respectable (middle and upper-class) femininity as passionless.[7] Thus, considered devoid of sexual desire, middle and upper-class Victorian women were at liberty to form close, ardent bonds with one another without censure. 'The shield of passionlessness that a woman was trained to raise before a man', Faderman argued, 'could be lowered with another woman without fear of losing her chastity and reputation'. [8] Whilst Marcus herself has noted the cultural limitations imposed upon women's heterosexual agency, and acknowledges the importance of Faderman's original claim that Victorians accommodated female couples, her study nevertheless contends Faderman's suggestion that this acceptance was because women were regarded as asexual. Instead, Marcus's study suggests that Victorians were both fully cognisant and accommodating of the implicit sexual nature of female couples. By describing and defining their relationships as marriages, women in female couples, Marcus argues, demonstrated their commitment to a restriction of conventional ideals pertaining to heterosexual matrimony. As Marcus observes, for the Victorians, marriage between men and women was the 'socially acceptable exhibition of sexual intimacy because it was predicated on fidelity' (BW, p. 203). Thus, whilst marriage signified the 'sexuality of spouses', it also confirmed their consent to adhere to the restraints and limitations imposed by that culturally sanctioned bond. By fashioning and presenting their own relationships as a model of heterosexual marriage, female couples, Marcus suggests, were not seen as the harbingers of a female 'sexual license' but were 'readily integrated' into mainstream Victorian society (BW, p. 203).

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[6] Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, pp. 159, 161. As is evidenced in the above discussion, Faderman makes no distinction between middle and (aristocratic) upper-class women.
[7] Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, p. 154.
[8] Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, p. 159.

Marcus's arguments, however, might perhaps be regarded as being more in keeping with those forwarded by Smith-Rosenberg's pioneering study of late-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century middle-class (American) women. Like Marcus, Smith-Rosenberg had suggested that a broad spectrum of intimate same-sex female bonds (which ranged across 'a wide latitude of emotions and sexual feelings') were not just 'casually accepted' but were considered to have been an 'essential aspect' of middle-class society.[9] Indeed Smith-Rosenberg's reading of the correspondence of two young Victorian women whose 'intense' and 'openly avowed' adolescent love for one another continued 'unabated' for nearly half a century, despite marital and geographic separation, is clearly echoed by Marcus's later claim that female bonds of amity formed in youth were invested with an importance that often meant they 'survived [after] marriage and maternity' (BW, p. 32).[10] Perhaps more significant, however, is the correlation between the fundamental premise of Smith-Rosenberg's arguments concerning the intricate interlacing of female kinship and friendship bonds, and Marcus's later suggestions that 'Victorians treated friendship and family life as complementary' (BW, p. 32). That is to say, prefiguring Marcus's claims, Smith-Rosenberg's study had persuasively demonstrated that during the nineteenth century there existed a deeply inter-related network of female friends and relatives whose devotion to one another arose from a continued commitment to their culturally assigned gender roles and identities. Central to the development and social sanctioning of these same-sex relationships, according to Smith-Rosenberg, was the 'ebb and flow' of women's biological lifecycle and the primary role of motherhood.[11] The shared experiences of 'frequent pregnancies, childbirth, nursing, and menopause' she argues, 'bound women together in physical and emotional intimacy'.[12] Although it was the supportive kinship bonds of mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts and first cousins that made up the core of this exclusively 'female world' of biological ritual, Smith-Rosenberg's study also reveals that women's principal role as mothers ensured that these homosocial relationships were fully extended into a network of friendships that crossed generations. Perhaps nowhere is this more apparent in Smith-Rosenberg's study than in her discussion of the transitional phase a young woman underwent when preparing to leave the maternal

[9] Smith-Rosenberg, 'The Female World of Love and Ritual', pp. 29, 1, 2.
[10] Smith-Rosenberg, 'The Female World of Love and Ritual', pp. 3, 4, 5.
[11] Smith-Rosenberg, 'The Female World of Love and Ritual', p. 24.
[12] Smith-Rosenberg, 'The Female World of Love and Ritual', p. 9.

home; an event, Smith-Rosenberg notes was instigated either by attending boarding school or through extended visits to a childhood friend of her mother's, who undertook the role of 'foster mother'.[13] Whilst adopting responsibility for their friend's daughters, for instance, these older women, Smith-Rosenberg suggests, not only 'supervised the young girl's deportment' and well-being but also assimilated her into 'their own network of friends and kin'.[14] Of equal significance, however, were the friendships young women themselves formed whilst at boarding school. Not only did these friends incorporate each other into one another's own kinship systems but these friendships also appear to have replicated and reinforced the important empathetic function of domestic kinship bonds. School friends, Smith-Rosenberg argued, helped each other 'overcome homesickness and endure the crisis of adolescence'; and older girls 'adopted' younger girls by becoming their 'pseudomothers', a relationship, Smith-Rosenberg suggests might last throughout their lives.[15]

By highlighting the important value of female friendship to both the individual lives of Victorian women and as a means of promoting and consolidating cultural expectations regarding women's assigned roles within heteronormative patriarchal society, Smith-Rosenberg's arguments can certainly be said to concur with some of those posited later in *Between Women*. Marcus, for example, also suggests that rather than undermining bonds between women, family and marriage 'provided models for sustaining' them (BW, p. 40). In fact Marcus, like Smith-Rosenberg, also highlights the mutually reinforcing benefits that Victorian commitments to family and friendships had upon one another. The dedication shown by female elders 'who prized their friendships with women', Marcus suggests, inspired emulation in younger female members of the family (BW, p. 40). Thus, whilst the family promoted female amity as an aspirational ideal, bonds between different generations of women within that family were consolidated by their shared sense of commitment to that ideal. As Marcus argues, the 'friendships that created bonds between individual women also forged a sense of connection between generations' (BW, p. 40).

[13] Smith-Rosenberg, 'The Female World of Love and Ritual', p. 18.
[14] Smith-Rosenberg, 'The Female World of Love and Ritual', p. 18.
[15] Smith-Rosenberg, 'The Female World of Love and Ritual', p. 18.

IV

Unsurprisingly, *Between Women* has generated notable attention from scholars, many of whom specifically recognize that it represents a significant turning point in the study of Victorian gender and sexuality. Jill Rappoport, for example, has described Marcus's text as an 'important corrective to dominant views that Victorian England found all same-sex relations shameful'.[16] Sharon Bickle has suggested that *Between Women* is not only an important contribution to our understanding of 'female gender roles and sexualities' because of the 'unparalleled' view of Victorian female homosociality it offers, but is also significant because it compels historians to 'reexamine' long-held critical assumptions which have framed previous studies.[17] Marcus's claims have received similar plaudits (although not without some instances of dissent) from a *Victorian Studies* Roundtable review of her study conducted by Martha Vicinus, Richard Dellamora and Laura Nym. Vicinus, for example, considers *Between Women* a 'landmark study', suggesting, like Bickle, that its significance is twofold. Marcus's text, she argues 'pushes Victorianists to see the centrality of women's friendships in the nineteenth century; at the same time, it encourages those of us in the field of sexuality studies to rethink current paradigms'.[18]

As all of these scholars acknowledge, the innovation of Marcus's contribution to the history of same-sex female intimacy is the result of a notable departure from prevailing critical beliefs that have long dominated the study of nineteenth-century women's same-sex relationships. Marcus's arguments, for instance, are markedly different to those forwarded recently by Vicinus. Although, like Marcus, Vicinus upholds the view that Victorian women 'idealized their same-sex friendships' she nevertheless suggests that these bonds were the cause of prevailing anxiety to mainstream middle-class society.[19] According to Vicinus, extensive efforts were made throughout the nineteenth century to define and

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[16] Jill Rappoport, 'Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England (review)', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Fall 2007), pp. 342-344, p. 344.
[17] Sharon Bickle, Review: *Between Women,* in *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (June 2010), pp. 127-130, pp. 127, 130, 127.
[18] Martha Vicinus, 'Book Review Forum: Normalizing Friendship', *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (Autumn, 2007), pp. 81-86, p. 83.
[19] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. xviii. Vicinus also suggests that male same-sex friendships were equally esteemed by Victorian men.

maintain a boundary between a culturally permitted same-sex desire, 'subsumed to its spiritual potential', and subversive erotic relationships associated with the 'sexual disorder of the French aristocracy' and Sapphism.[20] Even when venerated under these constraints, however, Vicinus suggests that women's friendships were repeatedly marginalised by the dominant discourses of the educated classes who were compelled to defend increasingly beleaguered heteronormative ideals. Widespread public conversations about sexual conduct and desires, framed within debates concerning 'prostitution, raising the age of consent, divorce, birth control', as well as male and female same-sex friendships, Vicinus argues, incited an 'outpouring of printed material' which endeavoured to reaffirm 'both the naturalness and the moral superiority of normative heterosexuality'.[21] Integral to this endeavour to bolster the cultural credibility of heterosexual marriage, Vicinus claims, was ensuring, as secondary, the status of female amity. The proliferation of texts, such as William Alger's *The Friendships of Women* (1867), she argues, primarily functioned to hierarchically differentiate between platonic, 'spiritualize[d]' female friendships and heterosexual love. Same-sex female bonding, according to Vicinus, was thus presented and only endorsed in such texts as either a rehearsal for and developmental stage toward marriage, or as providing women with a 'comforting substitute' for its absence.[22]

V

Like Vicinus, Carolyn Oulton has argued that Victorian ideals of women's same-sex relationships were framed within cultural apprehensions concerning the potentially transgressive nature of some these bonds.[23] Oulton discounts in particular Faderman's argument that it was specifically the emergence of late nineteenth-century discourses of psychoanalysis and sexology which generated unease about same-sex intimacy. As Oulton observes, Faderman's argument is founded upon the belief that it was the ensuing constructions of a lesbian identity that emerged from these medical discourses, which re-orientated prior cultural perceptions about the

[20] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends,* p. xviii.
[21] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. xvi.
[22] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. xviii; William Rounseville Alger, *The Friendships of Women*. 10th ed. (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1882), p. 4, quoted in Vicinus, p. xviii.
[23] Carolyn W. De La. Oulton, *Romantic Friendship in Victorian Literature* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). Oulton's study is concerned with both male and female same-sex relationships.

'unconscious innocence' of passionate same-sex bonds.[24] What had previously been defined as 'women's romantic friendships', Oulton explains, would, according to Faderman's historical reading, 'almost certainly be constituted as lesbianism' by a 'post-Freudian collective consciousness'.[25] The determining factor in the cultural approbation of Victorian same-sex intimacy is therefore, in Faderman's account, the absence of anxiety, Oulton suggests.

Conversely, Oulton's own study forwards the argument that tensions about the possible sexual nature of homosocial intimacy (both male and female) and its potential threat to Victorian heteronormative ideals were already in place long before the end of the nineteenth century. Echoing similar claims made elsewhere by Vicinus and Valerie Sanders, Oulton suggests that the arguments made at the *fin de siècle* by Havelock Ellis and other sexologists had already been registered much earlier in the century.[26] Oulton cites, for example, the fiction of novelists Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens, suggesting that both writers acknowledged and subsequently repudiated 'the sexual threat raised by [the] intensity and close intimacy' associated with romantic friendship.[27] Similarly, the writings of essayists, commentators and authors of conduct literature, she argues, disclosed fears about the disruptive erotic and sexual potential of same-sex amity. Writers on the topic of same-sex friendship, Oulton notes, repeatedly concerned themselves with 'the passionate impulsiveness of youth and the dangers inherent in such undirected passion'.[28] However, rather than being representative of an entirely proscriptive discourse that had an increasingly debilitating impact upon same-sex friendship throughout the century, according to Oulton these concerns were central to the establishment of far more discerning ideals. Although frequently these ideals were ambiguous or contradictory, advocates, commentators and writers, she suggests, nevertheless engaged in debates that actively sought to define same-sex friendship in terms of its rejection of non-normative erotic and sexual intimacy. Such concerns

[24] Oulton, *Romantic Friendship*, p. 2. Marcus's *Between Women*, which is framed within a similar understanding to that of Faderman, was published after Oulton's *Romantic Friendship* and is therefore absent from her discussion.
[25] Oulton, *Romantic Friendship*, p. 3.
[26] Vicinus, '"They Wonder to Which Sex I Belong": The Historical Roots of the Modern Lesbian Identity' in *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Autumn, 1992), pp. 467-497, p. 479; Valerie Sanders, *Eve's Renegades: Victorian Anti-Feminist Women Novelists* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1996), p. 27.
[27] Oulton, *Romantic Friendship*, p. 24.
[28] Oulton, *Romantic Friendship*, p. 1.

and fears therefore provided the parameters between what was and what was not acceptable, and in what contexts and circumstances different models of same-sex bonds were culturally legitimized. The 'excesses of 'romantic friendship'', for example, were endorsed, Oulton claims, as 'a precursor of [heterosexual] love indulged in by high-minded, although innocent, youth'.[29] Yet, whilst regarded as being 'sincere' they were considered (and expected) 'not [to be] enduring'.[30] Moreover, as a relationship that was specifically associated with the young (and, in particular, young or adolescent women), 'romantic friendship' was considered to belong to a separate category entirely from the 'more orthodox' form of 'restrained and sedate' friendship associated with and deemed appropriate to the bonds of older women.[31] Despite, however, a general consensus that (female) friendship was a vital facilitator of social and spiritual faculties, both paradigms were nonetheless regarded by Victorians as secondary to the idealized heterosexual bonds of marriage. The fictional texts of novelists and poets, Oulton suggests, can be seen to reinforce the arguments forwarded by writers of conduct manuals, journalists and essayists, all of whom offered accounts in which 'the ultimate end of friendship is foreseen in its displacement by the more intimate relation of marriage'.[32] The friendships of older women who had 'failed to marry' were similarly displaced in literary and non-literary discourses which tended to depict these relationships as compensatory.[33] Although ostensibly represented as being analogous with marriage because they were conceptualized in terms of mutually dependent companionships and framed within '[p]revailing assumptions about the decline of passion in later life', essayists and novelists alike, Oulton claims, tended to characterize these relationships as subordinate substitutes for conjugal ties and 'associated' them 'with lack'.[34] By contrast the romantic friendships of young Victorian women were celebrated and regarded as indispensible by some contemporaries precisely because of their association with passionate responsiveness. As Oulton's discussion evidences, physiologist Alexander Walker, writer William Alger, and novelist Dinah Mulock Craik all promoted youthful female friendships as a valuable stage of development

[29] Oulton, *Romantic Friendship*, p. 8.
[30] Oulton, *Romantic Friendship*, p. 8.
[31] Oulton, *Romantic Friendship*, pp. 9, 8.
[32] Oulton, *Romantic Friendship*, p. 5.
[33] Oulton, *Romantic Friendship*, p. 30.
[34] Oulton, *Romantic Friendship*, p. 30.

or rites of passage towards the elective and exclusive bond of marriage. Craik's essay on adolescent female friendship published in *A Woman's Thoughts About Women* (1857), Oulton argues, was particularly insistent about the pedagogical efficiency of this passionate model of female friendship. Craik's account 'of the function of [adolescent] female friendship', she argues, 'stresses its importance as not simply a precursor of, but in a very real sense a preparation, or rehearsal, for marriage'.[35] In addition, Oulton suggests that romantic friendships were also regarded as a culturally legitimate conduit for the healthy expression of passionate middle-class feminine sensibilities and female energies. Oulton, for instance, makes the claim (not unlike that made by Marcus) that, in a society in which overt female agency was censured within the heterosexual economy, the erotically charged bonds of youthful female friendship provided a socially sanctioned medium for the expression of ardent desire and mutual devotion that not only consolidated an adherence to the ideals of normative femininity but also provided a platform upon which to exhibit appropriate heterosexual desirability. 'Intense friendship', she argues, 'stood to offer not only a permissible outlet for female sensibility in particular, but even a useful means of displaying a susceptible and responsive nature to potential suitors'.[36] Evidence of an awareness of such expediency, Oulton notes, can be found both in the writing of social commentators, such as Alger, and novelists as prominent as Charlotte Brontë. In her reading of *Shirley*, for instance, Oulton argues that despite Shirley's attempt to uphold the conservative ideals of passive femininity by preventing Caroline from impetuously rushing to the aid of Robert Moore, she nevertheless later reveals to Robert her direct knowledge of Caroline's capacity for passionate sentiment, and effectively 'displays Caroline's attractive qualities for [his] titillation'.[37] In her reading of Alger's discussion of schoolgirl friendships, however, Oulton highlights how the socially sanctioned exhibition of female passion may have operated in a more direct and explicit fashion. Noting Alger's apparent delight in the spectacle of these young women's uninhibited intimacy with one another, Oulton argues that 'Alger's voyeuristic references to the unconstrained contact between women suggests the usefulness of

[35] Oulton, *Romantic Friendship*, p. 10.
[36] Oulton, *Romantic Friendship*, p. 9.
[37] Oulton, *Romantic Friendship*, p. 79.

female friendship as a means of conveying passion to male onlookers without sacrificing the demands of propriety'.[38]

Although Oulton demonstrates that the erotic potency of Victorian romantic friendship was 'celebrated', it was always a troubling concept, she claims, 'fraught with tensions and apparent contradictions'.[39] The distinctions that Victorian writers attempted to make between various bonds of same-sex intimacy, she suggests, is testimony to a wide-spread cultural cognizance of the disruptive threat these bonds were believed to have posed to heterosexual ideals. Fundamental to addressing this threat without undermining the ideal of female amity, according to Oulton, was the effort to carefully identify 'boundaries for the containment of emotion' wherein differences between socially licit and illicit expressions of female homosocial desire could be clearly defined.[40] As has been discussed above, one example of the ways in which Oulton suggests this was achieved was by classifying ardent or passionate same-sex desire as being exclusively characteristic of adolescent friendships. However, a 'related strategy', Oulton claims, was also deployed in fictional accounts of homosocial intimacy that involved contrasting an ingenuous protagonist alongside a 'lascivious' but 'compelling secondary figure'.[41] In being rendered immune from the advances of this dangerously charismatic figure by virtue of their naivety, the purity of the protagonist, Oulton suggests, is upheld at the expense of their lascivious friend. By portraying romantic friendship in terms of such dichotomies, Victorian authors were able to acknowledge its potential sexual hazards, Oulton argues, but 'without having to sacrifice the value of the ideal itself'.[42]

VI

Tess Cosslett's reading of the Victorian novel has identified a more subversive subtext in the fictional portraits of female amity, although ostensibly her claims can also be seen to presuppose some of Marcus's arguments. Like Marcus, for instance, Cosslett has argued that female friendship was depicted as being crucial to the facilitation and resolution of the conventional marriage plot in Victorian novels.

[38] Oulton, *Romantic Friendship*, p. 74.
[39] Oulton, *Romantic Friendship*, p. 73.
[40] Oulton, *Romantic Friendship*, p. 24.
[41] Oulton, *Romantic Friendship*, p. 24.
[42] Oulton, *Romantic Friendship*, p. 24.

Similarly, she has suggested that this fictional representation reflected ideological assumptions about the nature of female friendship and its significance in consolidating conventional feminine ideals. Like Marcus, for example, Cosslett, notes the frequent occurrence of potential love rivals to exchange a male suitor and, on occasions, explicitly demonstrate their mutual commitment to middle-class codes of feminine self-renunciation by 'offer[ing] him selflessly to the other'.[43] However, whilst Marcus has suggested that female amity was 'one of the relations that defined normative femininity' which the 'Victorian novel worked hard to reproduce', Cosslett's identifies a hidden agenda in the woman writer's representation of female amity and its signification of femininity (BW, p. 76). In fact, according to Cosslett, the representation of female friendship was particularly problematic for women writers precisely because it reinforced dominant cultural beliefs about distinct gendered ideals to which the woman writer did not completely adhere. Cosslett notes, for example, that female friendship formed an important supportive structure within Sarah Ellis's influential concept of women's domestic sphere. It was here that bonds between women could be consolidated as they 'help[ed] each other bear the hardships' of their inferior status.[44] Yet, as Cosslett argues, Victorian women writers, by virtue of their profession, 'were moving *away* from the traditional female role, into the 'male' sphere'.[45] This dilemma, she argues, prompted women writers to attempt to reconcile their anomalous position by reimagining alternative models of femininity. Elaine Showalter has similarly argued that the woman writer's deviation from traditional feminine roles was both a source of anxiety and the stimulus for representations of 'new heroines, new role models, and new lives'.[46] However, whilst Showalter has suggested that women writers deployed an indirect and subversive strategy of gender inversion to explore a suppressed (but longed for new form of) femininity and extended female roles, Cosslett argues that the Victorian woman writer appropriated, if not exploited fictional representations of female amity to achieve this end.[47] In particular, she suggests that the woman writer's fictional accounts of female friendship facilitated a twofold strategy of

[43] Tess Cosslett, *Woman To Woman: Female Friendship in Victorian Fiction* (Humanities Press International: Atlantic Highlands, 1988), p. 3.
[44] Cosslett, *Woman to Woman*, p. 5.
[45] Cosslett, *Woman to Woman*, p. 6. Cosslett's emphasis.
[46] Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Virago: London, 1982), p. 99.
[47] Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, p. 136.

negotiation and assimilation to construct new models of active and assertive femininity which accommodated the author's own unorthodox position. By juxtaposing an independent or unconventional heroine alongside her more 'angelic conventional friends' the woman writer, Cosslett claims, can be seen to symbolically convey the relationship between herself and that of the 'community of [her] 'ordinary' women' readers.[48] It is through the negotiations in which the unconventional heroine is '*overawed* by the goodness of her angelic friend, and want[ing] to be like her', whilst also maintaining her difference and 'superiority' that Cosslett suggests the woman writer was able to reconcile 'her own sense of exceptionality […] with her ideological bonds to traditional womanhood'[49] The transformation incurred in this fictional friendship, according to Cosslett's reading, also functioned reciprocally wherein the conventional woman adopted, in turn, some of the more assertive qualities of the unconventional heroine. In effect, Cosslett argues that the limitations imposed by a dichotomy of predominantly static images of Victorian femininity (angels and monsters, Madonnas and Magdalens) were exploited in the woman writer's portrait of dyadic female amity. The subsequent transformations that took place within and which were facilitated by that friendship, Cosslett suggests, resulted in an increased number of possible alternative models femininity:

> The pattern of the friendship is set up as a debate on the possible female identities a woman can take up; the merging of these identities represents a complex process of negotiation about acceptable female identity. Here, identification does not lead to simple reproduction of a static feminine ideal; it is made use of to stretch the limits of that ideal, and to include more diverse possibilities within it.[50]

In addition to providing more expansive and varied models of acceptable femininity, however, the woman writer's fictional representation of female friendship, according to Cosslett, also drew upon conservative cultural ideals of female amity to generate solidarity amongst women that offered them greater authority. Whilst Ellis's discourse on female friendship helped 'to keep women in their place', Cosslett suggests that this discourse nevertheless, 'transform[ed] that place into a strong

[48] Cosslett, *Woman to Woman*, p. 6.
[49] Cosslett, *Woman to Woman*, p. 6. Cosslett's emphasis.
[50] Cosslett, *Woman to Woman*, p. 8.

female community'.[51] This female solidarity, Cosslett argues, was subversively translated into the fictional accounts of the traditional marriage plot by women writers. Whilst the frequent exchange or gift of a man between two potential love rivals would have inevitably complied with the cultural 'convention that women [were] self-sacrificing angels', the woman writer '*use*[*d*]' this convention, Cosslett argues, not only to validate a merging of two seemingly static images of femininity but also to implicitly empower the two women: 'Instead of the two rivals being 'passive victims of the man's choice, they actively decide the matter between themselves'.[52] Notably, however, according to Cosslett this authoritative position taken up by the two women takes place 'in the guise of self-renunciation'.[53]

VII

Absent from all of these studies of same-sex-female relationships, including that of Marcus's, however, is any detailed consideration of Victorian sisterhood. In a similar manner to Marcus, however, Denis Flannery, in his recent book *On Sibling Love, Queer Attachment and American Writing*, has attempted to rectify what he regards as the predominant tendency of queer theory to rigidly conceptualise the family as a locus for repudiation, and 'a site from which the queer subject is expelled'.[54] In particular, Flannery identifies what is effectively demonstrated to be a paradoxical blind spot in both queer theory and other similar modes of writing: namely, the failure to ultimately acknowledge, or render explicit, the mutual interdependence of sibling love (defined in part by Flannery as 'sibling desire, antagonism and ambivalence') and queer attachment and subjectivity.[55] Whilst queer theory, Flannery argues, has 'averte[d] its gaze from the experience of sibling love' it nevertheless repeatedly 'invokes siblinghood as a metaphor, an initiatory experience, and […] a model'.[56] Flannery suggests, for instance, that despite recourse to a number of autobiographical family narratives in the 1999 Preface of *Gender Trouble* to part-explain the impetus for the writing of that text, Judith Butler failed to highlight the phenomenon of siblinghood which informed those narratives.

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[51] Cosslett, *Woman to Woman*, p. 6.
[52] Cosslett, *Woman to Woman*, p. 4. Cosslett's emphasis.
[53] Cosslett, *Woman to Woman*, p. 4.
[54] Denis Flannery, *On Sibling Love, Queer Attachment and American Writing* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 3.
[55] Flannery, *On Sibling Love*, p. 21.
[56] Flannery, *On Sibling Love*, p. 8.

Biographical accounts of 'gay cousins' (children of siblings), compelled to abandon their home, and an uncle (brother to one of Butler's parents) whose gender-anomalous anatomy resulted in his incarceration in an institution, isolating him from both family and friends, not only make visible the rejection by a 'familial monolith', Flannery argues, but also discloses specific issues of sibling desertion, ambivalence and remorse.[57]

Flannery offers a similar critique of Vicinus's historically detailed study *Intimate Friends* which, as he correctly observes, Vicinus was reluctant to align with some of the foundational concepts of queer theory; most pointedly, Butler's arguments relating to performativity and imitation. In particular, Flannery contests Vicinus's dismissal of the trope of sisterhood as a structuring metaphor for women's erotic and sexual bonds. Despite claiming that educated nineteenth-century women adopted and adapted a wide variety of kinship models derived from family life to frame their erotic or sexual relationships with other women, Vicinus has nevertheless argued that these women regarded the paradigm of sisters as an insufficient metaphor with which to define and express the intensity of their bonds.[58] Whilst acknowledging the importance that the sororal metaphor had in structuring 'egalitarian' bonds of nineteenth-century female friendship, '[i]ntimate friends', Vicinus claims 'were not united by sisterly ties, but by a stronger emotion' because 'sororal equality', she argues, 'implied […] sexual insipidness'.[59] In Vicinus's analysis of these women's partnerships it is the dyadic bonds of wife-husband or child-mother that she claims were most commonly appropriated. As Flannery has observed, however, Vicinus's study (which covers the period of 1778 to 1928) is replete with examples in which actual sisters, as well as models of sorority, were significant contributors in the production and facilitation of these women's relationships with one another. Flannery notes, for example, that Vicinus's account of Anne Lister's relationship with Mariane Belcombe overlooks the possibility that Lister's initial attraction to Belcombe was partly informed, if not incited by the fact that the latter was one of five sisters. Indeed, Flannery alerts us to

[57] Flannery, *On Sibling Love*, p. 5.
[58] Vicinus's disregard of the importance of siblinghood (in general) to expressions of nineteenth-century women's same-sex desire is contradicted further by her claim that these women 'subtly altered the meaning of mother, *aunt*, daughter, *niece*, *sister*, [and] *cousin*'. Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. xxv. My emphasis.
[59] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. xxvi.

the fact that Vicinus herself has claimed that Lister not only 'paid intensely flirtatious attention' to one of Mariane's sisters, but 'successfully and repeatedly seduced another'.[60] Flannery also draws attention to Vicinus's account of the relationship between the nineteenth century American actress Charlotte Cushman and her younger lover Emma Crow (discussed in more detail in chapter three of this thesis) to further highlight similar oversights. The initial success of this relationship, according to Flannery, can be seen to have been partly determined by Crow's, possibly unsuspecting, sister who, by implicitly undertaking the role of additional chaperone allayed paternal anxieties regarding Emma's 'infatuation' with the older actress.[61] This 'sibling facilitation of […] queer intimacy' is also 'reflected', Flannery claims, in Cushman's subsequent decision to orchestrate a marriage between her own sister's son and Emma Crow, thereby concealing, yet closely maintaining her relationship with the younger woman.[62] As Flannery's arguments persuasively suggest, whilst sorority is undoubtedly a recurrent aspect of the same-sex female bonds discussed in *Intimate Friends*, the significance of sisters as enabling and productive figures of queer desire between women is both unacknowledged and undermined by Vicinus's dismissal of the sororal metaphor.

In addition to rendering visible the interdependent status of sibling love and the non-heteronormative intimacy that 'haunts' queer theory and queer readings, Flannery's study also identifies a similar contradictory tendency to evoke and deny this mutuality in canonical American literature (from the 1850s to the post-modern era). Like the queer figure who is expelled from the family, as described by theorists such as Butler, sibling love, and by association its capacity to inaugurate possible queer attachments and subjects, is, Flannery argues, similarly displaced from its central importance in these fictional texts. In his reading of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, for instance, Flannery suggest that Nick Carraway's 'slavish, resentful love for Gatsby' can be read as being informed and instigated by the earlier actions of Nick's aunts and uncles.[63] However, whilst it is these sibling figures who 'contest or redirect parental authority' by deciding upon Nick's future career and thereby put into place the underlying foundations of a narrative which determines

[60] Flannery, *On Sibling Love*, p. 25.
[61] Flannery, *On Sibling Love*, p. 26.
[62] Flannery, *On Sibling Love*, p. 26.
[63] Flannery, *On Sibling Love*, p. 9.

the ensuing circumstances of the novel's characters, these pivotal figures, Flannery suggests, are subsequently 'repudiate[d]' by that narrative, and 'never returned to in any explicit way'.[64] Instead, Flannery argues, these elder siblings are only ever presented thereafter in the novel in a replicated form of other figures. Gatsby's decision, in compliance with the altruistic intent of Wolfshiem, to employ an entire family of brothers and sisters as domestic servants, for example, is read by Flannery as signalling a phantasmal echo of Nick's parents' siblings. Having drawn attention to this allusion Flannery suggests that we might now be able to understand Nick's love for Gatsby more clearly as a manifestation of his attempt to rediscover in Gatsby the comfort and support originally provided by his aunts and uncles. Thus, Flannery argues that:

> [i]f *The Great Gatsby* is a story of love between men then its homoerotic component and subtext might have as an affective model and a representational counterpart the shadowy (and subsequently erupting) narrative of sibling love, substitution, protection and power which underlies Nick Carraway's narration.[65]

Notably, Flannery's discussion of sibling substitution and, in particular, his claims that siblings can be seen to be inciters and enablers of queer attachment, presuppose later arguments made by Holly Furneaux in her study of Charles Dickens's fictional representation of male homosocial desire (discussed in more detail later in this thesis).[66] Furneaux, for instance, has suggested that Dickens's fiction presents siblinghood as a legitimate and effective conduit for the articulation of queer male attachment. Drawing upon and reflecting cultural beliefs regarding the similarity of differently sexed siblings, Dickens's fiction, Furneaux argues, frequently reveals how the dyadic homosocial desire of one male friend is unproblematically redirected towards the sister of the other. Subsequent marriage to that sister, Furneaux suggests, not only ensured the continued articulation of that originating homosocial desire but also its legitimization.

More pertinent to the primary focus of this thesis perhaps, although no less relevant to Furneaux's arguments, is Flannery's reading of the fictional portrait of

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[64] Flannery, *On Sibling Love*, p. 9.
[65] Flannery, *On Sibling Love*, p. 9.
[66] Holly Furneaux, *Queer Dickens: Erotics, Families, Masculinities* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

sisterhood and same-sex female desire in Henry James's 1886 novel *The Bostonians*. According to Flannery it is specifically James's depiction of sisters, Olive Chancellor (the novel's heroine) and, in particular, Mrs Luna, that 'establishes' *The Bostonians* 'as a text with a new and newly enabling relation to lesbian desire'.[67] James's otherwise conventional representation of this sibling bond, he argues, allows queer attachment to be both registered and facilitated within the novel. Although, primarily, it is Olive's desire for her feminist protégé, Verena Tarrant, which is illustrative of the novel's most obvious engagement with queer attachment, Flannery's reading also foregrounds a reciprocal relationship between this attachment and sororal intimacy that effectively eroticizes the sibling bond of Olive and Mrs Luna. Drawing attention to James's adherence to the nineteenth-century literary practice of defining sisterhood in terms of difference, for instance, Flannery suggests that Olive's desire for Verena can be seen as an indirect or deflected expression of her own erotic attraction to Mrs Luna. That is to say, whilst James's portrait of the 'glamorous' and 'worldly' Mrs Luna starkly differentiates her from Olive, it simultaneously equates her with Verena.[68] Accordingly, the 'similarly marked contrasts' of these two women to the novel's heroine, Flannery claims, serve to provide a parallel between the novel's portraits of sisterhood and same-sex female desire wherein the sibling bond of Olive and Mrs Luna can be seen to 'mirror and solidify' Olive's relationship with Verena.[69] However, what becomes visible in this resemblance, Flannery suggests, is Olive's desire for Mrs Luna. In choosing to love the 'sexually electrifying' Verena, he argues, 'Olive is choosing to love a version of her sister'.[70]

Flannery's reading, however, also directs us to a further destabilization of the boundaries between sororal intimacy and same-sex female desire in James's novel by highlighting an additional erotic element within the triangulated bonds of Olive, Mrs Luna and Verena. Having identified a number of possible instances of sexual rivalry that occur in the novel, including Mrs Luna's 'jealousy of Olive's interest in Verena', Flannery suggests 'that the jealousy between these three women operates in

[67] Flannery, *On Sibling Love*, p. 48.
[68] Flannery, *On Sibling Love*, p. 47.
[69] Flannery, *On Sibling Love*, p. 47.
[70] Flannery, *On Sibling Love*, pp. 47, 50.

another way': namely, through Verena's 'secret' desire to 'resemble' Mrs Luna.[71] Whilst, ostensibly, Verena's covert and frustrated aspiration to liken herself to 'Olive's brilliant sister' evidences her attraction to Mrs Luna, it is also implicitly suggestive of Verena's desire to supplant her as Olive's sister.[72]

As is made apparent in the above discussion, Flannery's revisionary analysis of the often overlooked relationship between queer attachment and sibling love draws attention to the fact that distinctions between these models of bonding become blurred in their corresponding resemblance to incestuous same-sex desire. However, in addition to foregrounding the hitherto obscured overlapping relationships that exist between siblinghood and incestuous homoerotic or homosexual intimacy, Flannery, in keeping with the premise of his revised reading of queer theory, suggests that queerness is a fundamental requirement of family life. In fact, according to Flannery, the 'family monolith' is not only more accommodating and accepting of its 'queer members' than has hitherto been acknowledged by queer theorists but is also both 'actively productive of and desiring of their queerness'.[73] Indeed, the family, he argues, is itself 'a school for queerness' in which siblinghood functions as its most explicit pedagogical resource. [74] In reference to Sedgwick's essay 'Tales of the Avunculate', for example, Flannery suggests that the realization on the part of the child that his or her parents are also siblings destabilizes that child's prior conception of a fixed (parental) identity. Obliged to revise 'previous coordinates of knowledge' and reconceive of their parents as having already lived (differently) within a dissimilar familial context of siblings, described by Sedgwick as 'differing, refractive relations', the child, Flannery claims, encounters alternative and varied models of (parental) identity.[75] The effect of this intervention of the avuncular, he suggests, is 'strikingly analogous to the impact on the queer subject of 'coming out''.[76] That is to say, this process of estrangement and conceptual reconfiguration experienced by a child, according to Flannery, offers a paradigm that

[71] Flannery, *On Sibling Love*, p.61; Henry James, *The Bostonians*, ed. R. D. Gooder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), quoted in Flannery, p. 61.
[72] James, *The Bostonians*, quoted in Flannery, *On Sibling Love*, p. 61.
[73] Flannery, *On Sibling Love*, p. 6.
[74] Flannery, *On Sibling Love*, p. 6.
[75] Flannery, *On Sibling Love*, p. 8; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Tales of the Avunculate: *The Importance of Being Earnest*', in *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), quoted in Flannery, p. 8.
[76] Flannery, *On Sibling Love*, p. 8.

enables the child to review and/or revise conceptions of their own identity. The subsequent realisation and re-evaluation of one's parent as a sibling to a brother, Flannery argues, is therefore indicative of how 'the family might well provide an affective model for the very process of self (disclosure/invention/confirmation […]) which marks the queer subject a consciously such'.[77]

At times, however, Flannery's account of siblinghood, as either instructive or pre-emptive of queer desire or identity, serves to reinforce rather challenge some of the tenets of queer theory. Most noticeable, perhaps, is a biographical portrait of childhood play he includes in his study which recounts the erotic game played by three brothers and, importantly, its abrupt and violent termination by their mother. Although, as Flannery suggests, these sibling high jinks were productive of a queer desire that invoked (male) homoeroticism and implicit incest, ultimately these queer attachments clearly become the object of direct and angry parental denunciation. Highly suggestive, in this biographical sketch, therefore, is that the lessons to be learned from this particular example of pedagogical siblinghood are fundamentally informed by a process of repudiation akin to Butler's arguments regarding the process of foreclosure in the constitution of heteronormative subjects. In particular, Butler has argued that any analysis of the cultural construction of a normative subject should recognise the contingent status of the abject in verifying the viability of that subject. The cultural legitimacy of a subject, she claims, is founded upon and perpetuated in opposition to those subjects or identities that have been rejected: '[w]hat is refused or repudiated in the formation of the subject continues to determine that subject'.[78] In light of Butler's analysis, the aforementioned biographical account of sibling homoeroticism appears to strongly evidence that the family's primary need for queerness is similarly founded upon a continued affirmation of its own valid normativity. Arguably, it would seem, at least on this occasion, siblinghood provides an education that, in the final instance, facilitates the consolidation of heteronormative ideals. It might therefore be claimed that

[77] Flannery, *On Sibling Love*, p. 8. Absent from Flannery's account is any comparative analysis of families in which neither parent has a sibling, brother or sister.
[78] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits Of "Sex"* (New York & London: Routledge, 1993), p. 190.

underlying or informing the familial investment made in queerness, as identified by Flannery, is a fundamental need for the subsequent repudiation of that queerness.

Consequently, a notable contrast can be seen to arise between some of the seemingly corresponding revisionary claims made by Flannery and Marcus regarding the interdependence of same-sex (or queer) attachment and familial bonds. For example, Marcus's innovative argument that the conventional bonds of middle-class Victorian mothers and daughters were structured by a culturally endorsed homoeroticism might ostensibly be seen to evidence a claim that the production of and desire for queer attachment were also requisite components of Victorian family life. However, unlike Flannery's account of sibling bonds, Marcus's analysis demonstrates that the eroticised aggression and objectification manifest in mother-daughter bonds did not function as the pedagogical means by which a discriminating distinction between normative and non-normative desire or identity was taught. Instead Marcus argues that the homoerotic dynamics of mother-daughter bonds were vital aspects of mainstream (middle-class) Victorian femininity, and wherein normative gender roles and associated practices were learned. Marcus suggests, for example, that Victorians would have expected that 'an engaged mother' would 'relish dressing and disciplining her daughters' (BW, p. 113). Moreover, this erotic interest and aggressive engagement with femininity, Marcus claims, was similarly replicated, if not rehearsed by those daughters who, informed both by maternal practices and doll literature alike, 'had to worship at the altar of femininity by idolizing, caressing, or tormenting her female doll (BW, p. 113).

VIII

As is perhaps apparent in the above comparison of Marcus and Flannery, underpinning Marcus's radical claims is her examination of the limitations of twentieth-century canonical studies of gender and sexuality which have been incorporated by studies that address the relationships between Victorian women. In particular, Marcus argues that literary-historicists have tended to either overlook or overdetermine the seminal insights of queer theory. As she acknowledges, the advent of queer theory has instigated a significant re-orientation of our understanding of a supposedly fixed, transhistorical 'natural' sexual identity, highlighting not only the social and discursive practices that facilitate its

construction, but also how notions of homo- and hetero- are inevitably interrelated. As has been discussed above, Judith Butler has demonstrated the instability of a socially sanctioned heterosexual identity which is inescapably dependent upon the abjection of homosexuality. Similarly, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, to whom Marcus acknowledges a particular debt, has illustrated how, in a nineteenth-century cultural (Western) climate of homophobia, male homosocial desire was heterosexually mediated (triangulated) through the rivalry for women.[79] As Marcus notes, however, these important insights have tended to conceptualise the inter-relationship of homo and hetero desire in terms of repudiation and opposition. Sedgwick's reading of triangulated homoerotic male desire in the novels of Dickens, for example, asserts that same-sex desire becomes particularly, if not exclusively intelligible in episodes of violence between men.[80] The emphasis upon shame, subversion, hostility and oppression associated with queer practices and identities, Marcus argues, has subsequently led both historians and literary critics alike to analyse bonds between Victorian women in terms of a 'basic conflict' between heteronormativity and homosocial desire (BW, p. 13). Marcus's own study, however, draws upon contemporary queer theory to radically revise this critical assumption. Whilst the inter-relatedness of homo and hetero informed Victorian concepts of marriage, family and same-sex female bonds, this inter-dependence, Marcus claims, was not understood in terms of an opposition between normativity and transgression but one in which gender norms were reinforced (but allowed women room for play). The underlying importance that Marcus's claims for her study, therefore, is that it 'makes a historical point about the particular indifference of Victorians to a homo/hetero divide for women' (BW, p. 13).

Marcus also draws attention to and challenges the constraints of feminist studies which, she argues, have undiscerningly utilized 'lesbian theory as a master discourse for understanding *all* relationships between women' (BW, p. 12; my emphasis). Marcus, for instance, identifies Adrienne Rich's influential concept of a 'lesbian continuum' as being particularly problematic, arguing that it obscures the

[79] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). See, for instance, Sedgwick's discussion of Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, pp.161-179.
[80] Holly Furneaux, *Queer Dickens: Erotics, Families, Masculinities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 15.

important differences that exist between various forms of same-sex female bonds by equating all forms of female intimacy 'with resistance to the family and marriage' (BW, p. 29). In contrast to Carol Smith-Rosenberg, who argued that same-sex female relationships occupied a secure, albeit sequestered place within mainstream heteronormative society, Rich, Marcus correctly notes, posits that 'women who place women at the centre of their lives risked stigma, ostracism, and violence' (BW, p. 10). In particular, Rich claimed that throughout history same-sex female bonding has been suppressed, disrupted or rendered invisible by what she argued was the patriarchal 'enforcement of heterosexuality for women'.[81] Effectively an oppressive 'institution' or 'political' mechanism, heterosexuality, according to Rich, principally functions to 'assur[e] male right of physical, economical and emotional access' to women by impeding or penalizing primary female bonds (sexual or otherwise).[82] The apparent widespread 'preference' of women to form sexual bonds with men, Rich argues, is not evidence of their 'natural' or innate sexual orientation but the inevitable result of cultural impositions and economic coercion. Rich suggests, for instance, that women have married 'because it was necessary, in order to survive economically, in order to have children who would not suffer economic deprivation or social ostracism, in order to remain respectable, […] and because heterosexual romance has been represented as the great female adventure, duty, and fulfilment'.[83] In addition, Rich claims that the primacy of heterosexuality has been maintained by either erasing exclusive female bonds through a process of historical denial or rendering them visible only in terms of illness or deviancy: 'lesbian existence', she argued, 'has been written out of history or catalogued under disease'.[84] Rich's use of the term 'lesbian', however, is deliberately redefined to comprehensively encompass a wide range or 'continuum' of relationships formed between women throughout their lives. Whilst this spectrum includes sexual bonds between women, it also incorporates (but is not restricted to) mother-daughter bonds, female friendship, comradeship, mentorship and networks of female collaboration, all of which are defined by Rich as erotic. Effectively, for Rich, the term 'lesbian' denotes all 'woman-identified' bonds between women.

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[81] Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Experience', *Signs*, Vol. 5, No. 4, Women: Sex and Sexuality (Summer, 1980), pp. 631- 660, p. 647.
[82] Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality', p. 647.
[83] Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality', p. 654.
[84] Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality', p. 648.

In addition to the lesbian continuum, Rich introduces the closely aligned concept of 'lesbian existence'. In part, according to Rich, lesbian existence denotes, as 'fact', the 'historical presence' of sexual bonding between women and the realities of their lived experiences within a hostile heterosexual culture; for example, 'role playing, self-hatred, breakdown, […] and intrawoman violence'.[85] Lesbian existence, however, is also defined by Rich as evidence of women's widespread resistance to 'prescriptive heterosexuality', not just explicitly by women who form sexual bonds with other women but implicitly by all women whose primary relationships at some stage or other during their life are with other women. Thus, framed within the context of a lesbian continuum, Rich argues that diverse 'aspects of woman identification', manifest in maternal bonds or established between female colleagues and co-workers, can be directly associated with earlier historical communities of independent 'women who refused marriage' as well as 'the more celebrated "Lesbians"' of Sappho.[86] Rich suggests, for example, that even the intimate childhood friendships of young girls can be conceptualised as correlating to the mediaeval Beguines or 'secret sororities and economic networks' that have been reported as existing amongst African women. Thus, Rich's analysis not only theorizes that all mainstream heterosexual societies are inimical to female same-sex relationships but, as Marcus has argued, Rich considers that 'all forms of female intimacy' are 'related by their common rejection of "compulsory heterosexuality"' (BW, p. 10).

IX

Consideration should be given here, however, to the limitations of Marcus's own arguments and, in particular, some of the assumptions she makes regarding the source materials that inform her analysis. As has been noted above, Marcus's study draws upon a diverse range of historical documents, including the conduct manuals of Sarah Ellis, pornography, and children's literature, as well as women's lifewriting and canonical novels. In the context of similar studies, however, Marcus's attention to the visual discourse of fashion iconography signals most clearly her intention to establish 'new arguments' about Victorian female homosocial desire (BW, p. 13). In particular, she claims that a close reading of Victorian fashion plates reveals that the

[85] Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality', p. 649.
[86] Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality', p. 651.

content of these illustrations frequently depicted women engaged in 'rituals replete with the voyeurism, objectification, and domination that have been mistakenly declared the sole property of men' (BW, p. 116). The popularity of fashion plates and women's avid consumption of such spectacles therein, she argues, evidences a culturally endorsed facilitation of women's homoerotic fantasies which served to consolidate and signify their social status. The erotic discourse of fashion plates, Marcus suggests, 'trained Victorian women to assume the appearance of middle-class femininity by indulging their pleasure in looking at female bodies, their longing to touch them, and their desire to control them' (BW, p. 135). Marcus's analysis further collapses the distinction between these women's fantasies and the erotic practices depicted in fashion plates by suggesting that the consumption of such images was itself an active participation in homoerotic objectification and agency. Her interpretation is certainly innovative, and she provides ample evidence gained from her reading of lifewriting to testify to the pleasure Victorian women gained from looking at and being in the company of attractive women. The claims Marcus forwards, however, regarding their responses to commercially produced constructs of desirable femininity are rather over confident, if not incautious. In addition, for instance, to her implicit suggestion that Victorian women 'took pleasure' in mentally undressing 'images that reduced women to lovely bodies', she makes the rather bold assertion that the 'objectification of female figures [depicted] in fashion plates […] enhanced the subjectivity of the women who apprehended them' (BW, pp. 135, 120). The certainty of such a claim, however, prompts us to ask how this could ever be fully validated. As Ros Ballaster has suggested, the recovery of Victorian women's responses to the constructions of femininity offered in women's magazines and journals is ultimately beyond our full comprehension. Whilst the wide circulation of nineteenth-century women's magazines, she argues, is certainly suggestive that '*some* desire was satisfied' by these publications, 'to suppose that we can define precisely what pleasure […] readers actually got from their reading', she claims, 'is somewhat […] hazardous'.[87] Moreover, as is made apparent in Ballaster's study, but which is overlooked in Marcus's reading, problematic in any attempt to determine the responses elicited by these magazines is

[87] Ros Ballaster, Margaret Beetham, Elizabeth Frazer and Sandra Hebron, *Women's Worlds: Ideology, Femininity and the Woman's Magazine* (London: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 85-86. Author's emphasis.

the fact that they presented their readers with conflicting models of femininity. In her analysis of the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, for instance, Ballaster observes that the 'most immediately striking aspect of the magazine and a major selling-point was the fashion plate'.[88] Yet whilst these illustrations defined the middle-class woman as an 'object of desire' and a 'symbol of female beauty and conspicuous consumption', the same magazine also presented its middle-class readers with an entirely different model of femininity defined in terms of active and practical, if not mundane, housekeeping.[89] In accordance with its premise of providing information and instruction regarded as necessary to successful homemaking the magazine supplied its women readers with recipes and sewing-patterns, for instance, as well as guidance on the management of household budgets. As Ballaster acknowledges, how readers actually navigated or engaged with such conflicting definitions of femininity is fundamentally a matter of speculation.[90] She does, however, suggest that one way in which the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, in particular, enabled its readers to reconcile contradictory definitions of glamorous and domestically industrious feminine identity was through the inclusion of the sewing-pattern that accompanied the fashion plate, and which allowed women to reproduce the illustrated costume for themselves. The potential source of ideological conflict, Ballaster argues, was 'literally papered over with the paper pattern'.[91] Although this reading demonstrates how women may have been able to negotiate the latent tensions of contradictory definitions of femininity, it nevertheless alerts us to the fact that fashion iconography was part of a broader discourse of middle-class femininity that constructed women in more ambiguous ways than Marcus acknowledges. Given, therefore, that the fashion plate was presented directly alongside competing or conflicting characterisations of feminine ideals in publications targeted specifically at a bourgeois readership, such as the aforementioned *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, it would seem reasonable to argue that the middle-class Victorian woman's engagement with, if not her emulation of desirable (and erotic) femininity is likely to have been more complicated than Marcus suggests.

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[88] Ballaster, Beetham, Frazer, and Hebron, *Women's Worlds*, p. 90.
[89] Ballaster, Beetham, Frazer, and Hebron, *Women's Worlds*, p. 90.
[90] Ballaster, Beetham, Frazer, and Hebron, *Women's Worlds*, p. 85.
[91] Ballaster, Beetham, Frazer, and Hebron, *Women's Worlds*, p. 90.

X

Similar assumptions, however, about the fictional and prescriptive constructions of middle-class femininity and homosocial desire also appear to inform and limit Marcus's analysis of the Victorian novel. In particular, her reading of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* exposes an implicit suggestion that, in its representations of female same-sex bonding, the Victorian novel was almost exclusively governed by a commitment to articulate mainstream conservative *ideals* concerning the alliance between female homosociality and heteronormativity. According to Marcus, *Villette* is an 'exception' amongst Victorian novels because it fails to conform to the conventional marriage plot wherein marriage is depicted as having being fully dependent upon an enabling prior friendship between two women (BW, p. 102). Brontë's novel, Marcus suggests, is relatively unique in that its heroine, Lucy Snowe, 'survives her failure marry' despite her 'anomalous distaste for other women's amity' (BW, p. 102). Although Brontë's fictional portraits of female homosocial desire in *Villette* are discussed in more detail in the first chapter of this thesis, some comment is warranted here in order to highlight the limitations of what appears to be Marcus's suggestion that the Victorian novel operated primarily (if not almost exclusively) as medium to consolidate conservative ideals of middle-class heteronormative femininity through its depiction of same-sex female bonds.

In her introduction to *Between Women* Marcus justifies the place afforded to the novel in her analysis by arguing that it 'was one of the most important cultural sites for representing and shaping desire, affect, and ideas about gender and the family' (BW, p. 8). In keeping with this declaration, she subsequently demonstrates how Sarah Ellis's prescriptive portrait of altruistic female homosociality was co-opted and transformed in the ubiquitous marriage plot of Victorian novels. As Marcus's readings illustrate, both conduct literature and the Victorian novel constructed same-sex female friendship as being integral to the promotion and facilitation of companionate heterosexual marriage. Marcus observes, for instance, that in *The Women of England* and *The Daughters of England* Ellis portrayed

altruistic female amity as a valuable affective paradigm for the development of a more egalitarian concept of marriage by encouraging potential suitors and husbands alike to 'imitate [female] friends' (BW, p. 68). Similarly, in her reading of a variety of Victorian novels, Marcus persuasively argues that companionate marriage was also defined as being dependent upon and formulated through the prior existence of female friendship. The Victorian novel, she suggests, repeatedly represented female amity as a locus in which one woman 'express[ed] her love' for another by ensuring her friend's eventual marriage to a suitable husband (BW, p. 82). The significant interrelationship between female homosociality and marriage, Marcus observes, is underscored in those novels whose heroine's fail to marry because of 'their disengagement from female friendship' (BW, p. 80). In these texts the 'plot of female amity', she claims, effectively works in reverse to 'suggest that a heroine who lacks a female friend almost always has an uneasy relationship to marriage' (BW, p. 80). Notably epitomising this inverted discourse, according to Marcus, is Brontë's *Villette*, wherein Lucy's failure to marry Marcus regards as being attributable to Lucy's 'idiosyncratic rejection of female friendship' (BW, p. 102).

Whilst elsewhere Marcus's analysis is highly convincing in demonstrating that dominant cultural ideals regarding the interrelationship between female friendship and marriage were reiterated and reinforced in the Victorian novel, her endeavour to highlight this nevertheless reveals the limitations of her reading of *Villette*. More specifically, Marcus's analysis overlooks the fact that Brontë's novel explicitly offers a fictional account of the experiences of an impoverished middle-class woman who is displaced from the domestic realm, and whose bonds with other women were necessarily formed in the workplace. This is not to suggest, however, that the plot of female amity is excluded from (or reversed in) *Villette*, as Marcus argues. Indeed, Marcus's reading is directly contested in this thesis by demonstrating that Brontë's depiction of Lucy's relationship with Paulina de Bassompierre fully accords with this ideal. Yet Brontë's novel also functions as a medium that draws attention to how other complex forms of same-sex female intimacy were produced in the working environment. As is subsequently discussed in the thesis, the Victorian ideal of middle-class femininity was regarded as being fundamentally incompatible with female employment. Even those roles acknowledged as being appropriate for impoverished genteel women, such as the

governess, seriously destabilized the social status of the middle-class women. Moreover, as Brontë herself discovered, the idea that a governess might assuage her isolation and decline in social status by assuming a friendship with her female employer was effectively a cultural taboo. Rare instances, however, in which a bond of amity *was* established between these two figures appears to have been occasions that could prove highly disruptive to the organisation family household. Lady Kay-Shuttleworth, for instance, chose to permanently absent herself from the family home, leaving both her husband and children to spend the remainder of her life travelling the continent in the company of the family's governess. Marcus's study, however, principally framed within a limited reading of Sarah Ellis's didactic idealism, fails to consider the social circumstances of those women who were compelled to become economically self-sufficient. Consequently, no attention is brought to bear upon what challenges middle-class female employment might have posed to women's social identity, or what impact this may have had on their same-sex relationships. It is perhaps inevitable, therefore, that in her reading of *Villette* she fails to acknowledge that the two most intense bonds Brontë's heroine forms with other women are established in the workplace. Absent from Marcus's analysis, for instance, is any comment about Lucy relationship with the aged spinster Miss Marchmont. Not only does Marcus overlook the decline in Lucy's social and economic circumstances that necessitate her accepting Miss Marchmont's offer to become a paid companion, but Marcus also fails to note that in undertaking this employment Lucy gains both economic salvation and emotional solace.

Brontë's novel also offers its readers a portrait of more unorthodox forms of femininity and female homosocial bonding through its portrait of the large continental boarding school for girls where Lucy teaches. It is from within this hierarchically structured environment (ranging from schoolgirls (Ginevra Fanshawe) and teachers, including a senior mistress (St. Pierre), to the directress (Madame Beck)) that most of Lucy's bonds with other women take shape. It is, however, Madame Beck, another of Lucy's employers, with whom Brontë's heroine forms her most intense and ambivalent bond. Lucy, for instance, finds Madame Beck a uniquely attractive and inspirational figure of empowered femininity. She incites both Lucy's professional ambitions and romantic rivalry, and in the process becomes the exclusive object of Lucy's homoerotic fascination. Other than to suggest,

however, that the 'commanding Madame Beck' represented one of a number of 'feminine types' who 'provide[d] Lucy with opportunities to spurn female friendship in all its forms', Marcus makes no comment about the bond between Lucy and her employer (BW, p. 103). Yet the relationship between these two women occupies a prominent position in *Villette*. Situated alongside Lucy and Paulina's 'plot of female amity', the novel's portrait of Lucy's ambivalent attraction to the authoritative directress provides a counter-narrative to conservative ideals by gesturing towards unconventional forms of middle-class feminine desire and ambition that are established outside of the parameters of those ideals.

XI

Some final comment should be made here also about Marcus's reading of women's lifewriting, arguably the foundation upon which the overarching claims of her study are grounded. In justifying what is effectively a return to the 1970s feminist methodology of Smith-Rosenberg's pioneering study, Marcus suggests that the findings of subsequent historical studies have been distorted by an overemphasis upon the significance of journalism, medicine and criminality. The predominate use of such primary sources as a means to understand the cultural significance of Victorian women's same-sex intimacy, Marcus claims, has resulted in an overdetermined critical association of these bonds with disruptive deviancy. The lives recorded in diaries and letters written in '[w]omen's own words', however, she suggests, provide us with the opportunity to directly access women's lived experiences and participation in mainstream cultural practices which furnish us with a far more representative historical account (BW, p. 33). Whilst this copious record of unvarying domestic minutiae might prove somewhat disappointing to those seeking to discover hitherto undisclosed confessions of forbidden desire, women's lifewriting, according to Marcus, evidences an 'adherence to rules and [a] commitment to typical daily life [that] makes it a far more valuable source than conduct literature, medical writings, or police records for understanding how conventions shaped lived behaviour' (BW, p. 38). What becomes apparent from a reading of the uniformly bland accounts of women's conventionally organised lives, Marcus claims, is the integral place that female friendship had in middle-class Victorian family life. Marcus suggests, for instance, that women's correspondence

was primarily organized around an interconnecting network of friends and kin, and that female friendship was itself a prevailing topic of interest recorded in both the letters and diaries written by these women. Moreover, whilst Marcus suggests that the pervasiveness of female amity documented in these personal texts evidences the fact that 'middle-class Victorians treated friendship and family life as complementary', she also argues that an emphasis on female friendship (as a topic) in women's lifewriting also 'mirrored the ways in which didactic literature defined it as an expression of women's essential femininity' (BW, pp. 32, 39). However, whilst the personal letters and diaries of these women served to consolidate gender ideals and assimilate bonds between a network of family and friends, according to Marcus, they were not regarded as being the exclusive property of correspondents and self-reflective diarists but frequently formed the basis of numerous biographies. In addition to quoting extensively from women's diaries, biographers would also draw heavily upon the correspondence between friends and kin which, Marcus argues, provided 'the most common and copious source for documenting women's lives' (BW, p. 39). What therefore emerges from Marcus's reading is that, through its insistent emphasis on friendship, Victorian women's lifewriting not only encoded and enacted cultural ideals of femininity but ultimately, on occasions, became part of a much broader social script that also celebrated mainstream femininity in terms of its commitment to female amity.

Marcus's analysis is somewhat problematic, however, in its failure to acknowledge the possible cultural constraints placed upon women's lifewriting which may have resulted in compromised accounts of their lived experiences. Little attention is given to the implications of her own claims, for instance, that locked or secret diaries were frowned upon and that 'people regularly burnt correspondence and personal documents' (BW, p. 36). Here, one might be reminded of Charlotte Brontë who, in accordance with her husband's insistence, instructed Ellen Nussey that she must 'burn' any subsequent correspondence between themselves.[92] Such was Nicholls's fear that the contents of Brontë's letters to Nussey might be seen by others that he threatened to 'elect himself censor of [their] correspondence' unless

[92] Charlotte Brontë, Letter to Ellen Nussey, 20 October 1854, in Margaret Smith, ed., *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë with a selection of letters by family and friends*, Volume III, 1852- 1855 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), p. 295. Brontë's emphasis.

Nussey provided ('in a legible hand') a written 'pledge' of compliance.[93] Though Nicholls's anxiety to safeguard the privacy of Brontë's intimate correspondence with Nussey was no doubt informed by Brontë's prominent status as celebrated author, writers of conduct literature were no less concerned about the nature of written correspondence between less exceptional women. In a chapter discussing female friendship in *The Daughters of England*, for example, Sarah Ellis expressed a fear that 'the minute details of family affairs [would] be raked up' in the letters exchanged between young women, and thus recommended a list of suitable topics for discussion.[94] In *The Mothers of England* Ellis reiterated her apprehension, claiming that '[i]n all the intimacies of friendship' it was 'especially' the correspondence between young women that was entered into 'with more feeling than prudence'.[95] Whilst Ellis declared that a mother 'cannot *force* herself into these intimacies' she nevertheless counselled them to encourage their daughters to feel less than comfortable in maintaining a correspondence without their mother 'sharing it, or at least giving it her entire sanction'.[96] Similarly, Charlotte Yonge advised that daughters should be encouraged to openly divulge the contents of their correspondence to their mothers. Having led by example, and read extracts from her own letters to the rest of the family, a mother, Yonge suggested, would inspire her daughters to 'imitate her, and generally bring their letters to her as wanting her sympathy, and having no secrets from her'.[97] If their friends objected, Yonge claimed, a mother could 'safely' inform her daughters that 'they cannot be good friends'.[98] As Marcus herself has observed, it was common practice for both girls and women to 'read their diaries aloud to sisters and friends' (BW, p. 35). Given Yonge's recommendations, it would also appear that a similar practice of disclosure

[93] Brontë, Letter to Ellen Nussey, 31 October 1854, in Smith, ed., *Selected Letters of Charlotte Brontë* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), pp. 239-240. Brontë's emphasis. Brontë seems to have been amused by her husband's concern, and sought to assure Nussey that it was 'not old friends that he mistrust[ed]', Brontë, Letter to Ellen Nussey, 7 November 1854, in Smith, ed., *Selected Letters*, p. 240. Brontë's emphasis. Nussey, however, appears to have resented Nicholls's interference: 'My dear Mr Nicholls | As you seem to hold in great horror the ardentia verba [fervid words] of feminine epistles, I pledge myself to the destruction of Charlotte's epistles henceforth, if You, pledge yourself to no censorship in the matter communicated', Ellen Nussey quoted in Smith, ed., *Selected Letters*, note 4., p. 240. Nussey's emphasis.

[94] Sarah Ellis, *The Daughters of England, Their Position in Society, Character & Responsibilities* (London: Fisher, Son & Co., 1842), p. 285.

[95] Sarah Ellis, *The Mothers of England, Their Influence and Responsibility* (London: Fisher, Son & Co., 1843), p. 339.

[96] Ellis, *The Mothers of England*, p. 339. Ellis's emphasis.

[97] Charlotte Yonge, *Womankind* (New York & London: Macmillan, Mozley and Smith, 1877), p. 146.

[98] Yonge, *Womankind*, p. 146.

was extended to the correspondence of those girls and young women whose mothers chose to follow Yonge's advice. Although this practice may well have helped to consolidate female bonds across a network of family and friends, as Marcus claims, it is clearly apparent that it was also promoted by some as a useful and necessary means of censorship; effected in the first instance through a maternal interest that was intended to ultimately educate daughters in the exercise of discretion. Yonge, for instance, advocated that 'some […] consideration' should be given to older girls whom, she argued, should be permitted to determine for themselves what aspects of their correspondence they chose to divulge.[99] Yet this liberty, according to Yonge, was dependent upon these young women having first demonstrated that they had been 'formed enough to deserve trust'.[100]

By drawing attention to the possible constraints placed on the liberty for self-expression in women's lifewriting it is not my intention to invalidate its status as a highly important historical source, but it is reasonable to argue that this lifewriting offers us narratives of lived experiences that could be somewhat partial. Nevertheless, it should be noted here that in accordance with Marcus's study, this thesis also makes similar critical investments in women's lifewriting. The journals and letter-books of late-Georgian governess Ellen Weeton, in particular, are afforded a central place in my analysis of nineteenth-century homosocial desire in the workplace. As I explain in my analysis, however, Weeton's lifewriting is a considerably valuable primary source with which to explore the topic of female homosociality. Her adamant refusal to disclose the contents of her journals and letter-books, even to her closest friend, means that we have direct access to biographical documents that were not subject to external censure.

XII

The foundation of my interest in middle-class Victorian women's same-sex relationships has its origin in an earlier project that explored late nineteenth-century debates surrounding the emergence of the New Woman. As a pioneering New Woman of an earlier generation yet vehement critic of female emancipation throughout most of the last half of the century, Linton (and her novel *The Rebel of*

[99] Yonge, *Womankind*, p. 146.
[100] Yonge, *Womankind*, p. 146.

the Family) was central to that project. Whilst the topic of same-sex female desire was not part of that research I was intrigued (as perhaps I was intended to be) by Linton's fictional portrait of the lesbian women's rights activist Bell Blount. My intrigue was compounded by the frequent suggestions made by critics who claimed that Linton's problematic antifeminism, evidenced in her contradictory messages about traditional and unorthodox femininities, was a manifestation of her own conflicted sexual identity. Linton's biographer Nancy Fix Anderson, for example, has claimed that Linton's erotically charged portraits of unconventional femininity enabled Linton to both express and deny her sexual desire for other women.[101] Deborah Meem similarly claimed that Linton's writing enabled her to covertly or indirectly express her love and erotic fascination for other women.[102] Most recently, Martha Vicinus has suggested that Linton exploited her fiction to fulfil and legitimize her own 'unruly desire for women by imagining herself to be a man'.[103] The 'honourable' heroes of her novels, Vicinus argues, 'were the spokespersons for Linton's deepest desires'.[104] Having roused my curiosity, I first set about the task of finding out if these claims could be substantiated. My preliminary investigations into Linton, and what might retrospectively be termed Victorian lesbianism, quickly broadened, however, into a more expansive exploration of Victorian same-sex female intimacy after the initial findings of my research indicated that not only was Linton's apparent lesbianism a highly problematic issue in the Victorian era but that same-sex female intimacy in general was regarded with some anxiety and suspicion.

XIII

By placing such a prominent emphasis upon a single study this thesis may perhaps be regarded as somewhat limited in its scope. The extent to which Marcus's *Between Women* radically challenges the long-held views forwarded by other scholars of nineteenth-century gender studies, however, demands our attention, and that we look again at Victorian female homosociality from a perspective no longer framed from within the paradigms of either marginalisation or transgression. Although such an

[101] Nancy Fix Anderson, *Woman Against Women in Victorian England: A Life of Eliza Lynn Linton* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987).
[102] Deborah Meem, 'Eliza Lynn Linton and the Rise of Lesbian Consciousness' in *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 7, No. 4, (April 1997), pp. 537-560. According to Meem, it was 'only by tortured indirection' that Linton could 'own her [sexual] desire' for other women, p. 559.
[103] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. 144.
[104] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. 150.

assertion might seem rather bold its validity can nevertheless be evidenced by drawing attention to some of the marked departures that *Between Women* makes from extant studies. Marcus affirms, for instance, the pioneering argument made by Smith-Rosenberg that a variety of same-sex female relationships were comfortably accommodated and flourished in mainstream heteronormative society. Unlike Smith-Rosenberg, however, *Between Women* illustrates that these bonds were neither regarded as compensatory nor marginal. In keeping with the later studies of Cosslett and, more recently, Oulton, Marcus demonstrates how female friendships were culturally idealised as an important facilitator of marriage. *Between Women*, however, offers us a far more radical (and historically nuanced) understanding of the alliance between female homosocial desire and the mainstream Victorian heterosexual economy by suggesting that the models of both altruistic female amity *and* female marriage were also significant contributors to the development of a more egalitarian concept of companionate marriage. Marcus's historical revision of the interdependence of homo-hetero- might also be seen to echo Flannery's insistence that we acknowledge queer desire as an inherent component of normative familial identities and practices. For Flannery, however, this recognition is dependent upon exhuming queer desires and identities that haunt the family. In contrast, Marcus persuasively argues, not least in her analysis of mother-daughter bonding, that queer desire and practices were vital aspects normative feminine identities.

The aim of my thesis, however, is not to provide an uncritical endorsement of *Between Women* through the transaction of readings that confirm or conform to Marcus's arguments. Instead it identifies and addresses a number of important issues relating to Victorian middle-class female homosociality that are absent from *Between Women*; and confronts a number of questions that Marcus's analysis raises but fails to answer. Building on the arguments of Cosslett, for example, I examine the role of the professional female author and its deviation from the cultural ideals of feminine self-renunciation. Unlike Cosslett, however, this thesis considers the relationships between women writers themselves, rather than between the woman author and her female readership. By considering the competitive professional relationships of prominent writers such as Brontë, Craik, Linton, and George Eliot, I bring attention to bear upon the issues of female conflict and rivalry which receive little attention in Marcus's analysis. I explore, for instance, how the fictional

representation of (male) homosocial desire became a locus through which Eliot repudiated Craik's earlier benign portrait of class mobility.[105]

The issues of rivalry, female employment, and its ensuing destabilization of class identity are, in fact, significant absences from *Between Women*. Its primary focus on how women's same-sex relationships shaped and were shaped by marriage and the family has led to a failure to consider the lives of those middle-class women whose need for employment displaced them from their own domestic sphere. The important question, therefore, of how the cultural ideals of middle-class femininity and homosociality were translated into the workplace is one that Marcus fails to ask. In attempting to address this oversight I consider in detail the relationships of early nineteenth-century governess Ellen Weeton, as well as Brontë's ambivalent relationship with her employer Madame Heger. Framed within these biographical narratives, this thesis then offers a reading of Brontë's *Villette* which takes full account of its fictional representation of same-sex female intimacy in the working environment, and in particular the close bonds Lucy Snowe forms with her respective employers: Miss Marchmont and Madame Beck.

In addition to extending the parameters of *Between Women* to include an investigation of the intersection of professional relationships and homosocial desire this thesis also addresses further oversights in Marcus's analysis by examining the bonds of Victorian sisters. As Marcus herself has noted in her study, contemporary discourses (both fictional and prescriptive) frequently juxtaposed female friendship alongside sisterhood. Yet the significance of an idealised affinity between same-sex female friendship and sororal intimacy is afforded scant comment in *Between Women*. Prompted by this omission my thesis examines the cultural construction of both models of female bonds in the work of social commentators such as Linton and William Alger, as well as in the didactic literature of Charlotte Yonge. The thesis then offers a detailed reading of Linton's fictional portrait of same-sex female friendship and sisterhood as experienced by her semi-autobiographical heroine Perdita Winstanley in *The Rebel of the Family* (1880).

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[105] In particular, I examine Eliot's portrait of Tom Tulliver and Philip Wakem's relationship in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and Craik's portrait of John Halifax and Phineas Fletcher's relationship in *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1856).

Both Linton and *The Rebel*, as well as her antifeminist journalism, however, also provide valuable sources with which to assess what is perhaps Marcus's most radical claim: that female marriage was comfortably accepted by mainstream respectable Victorian society. Although elsewhere Marcus has correctly acknowledged that Linton was well acquainted with 'many prominent lesbians of her day', such as the actress Charlotte Cushman and feminist writer Matilda Hays, Linton is a notable omission from *Between Women*.[106] As Martha Vicinus has observed, however, Linton's portrait of the strident, man-hating Bell Blount in *The Rebel* introduced the Victorian reading public to 'the first full-scale realistic portrait of a lesbian villain'.[107] In recognition of this claim, this thesis offers a reading of the novel which is situated alongside both Marcus's arguments and Linton's periodical essays.

This thesis also engages directly with Marcus's claims regarding mainstream female homoeroticism, and in particular her arguments regarding the female objectification of women. Although Marcus suggests that the visual constructs of fashion iconography functioned to serve the interests of the heterosexual economy whilst simultaneously inciting a culturally endorsed female appetite for desirable femininity, her analysis is primarily developed from the imposition of her own reading of fashion plates. My own examination of the Victorian female gaze, whilst indebted to Marcus's innovative claims, draws upon the writing of Dinah Craik to consider how cultural anxieties about emergent female (hetero)sexuality may have defined homoerotic female objectification as a form of surveillance.

[106] Sharon Marcus, 'At Home with the Other Victorians' in *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 108, No. 1 (Winter, 2009), pp. 119-145, p. 126.
[107] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. 149.

Chapter I

Employing Middle-Class Female Homosocial Desire

In this chapter I explore same-sex female relationships that were formed outside of the domestic parameters discussed in Marcus's study. Primarily my own discussion focuses upon how nineteenth-century cultural ideals of middle-class female bonding were variously impeded, upheld and transformed within the workplace. Central to this discussion is my examination of the late-Georgian governess and teacher Ellen Weeton, and Charlotte Brontë who, prior to her successful literary career in the mid-nineteenth century, had also been employed as a governess and teacher. In the first part proper of the chapter I discuss how Weeton utilised her employment as a means to facilitate bonds of female amity with her employers, despite differences in their social status. The issue of social status is explored further in the following section as I problematize Marcus's definition of Victorian "middle-class" identity as singular. In this discussion I argue that Marcus's misunderstanding of class identity results in a failure to accommodate in her study the importance of female homosocial desire to working middle-class women. In the final part of my chapter I address this oversight by discussing Brontë's relationship with her employer Madame Heger, before examining Brontë's portrait of Lucy Snowe's same-sex relationships in her semi-autobiographical novel *Villette*.

Having been compelled by economic necessity in 1839 to find paid work outside of the family home, like many other middle-class women during the early to mid-nineteenth century, Charlotte Brontë undertook her first position of employment working as a governess. In her correspondence to her sister Emily, and her friend Ellen Nussey, Brontë provided a litany of complaints regarding the working conditions of her first position at the Sidgwick residence, including parental indifference to badly behaved children and the 'overwhelm[ing]' burden of 'oceans of needlework'.[1] One particular recurring complaint that Brontë made to her sister, however, was that her mistress, Mrs Sidgwick, 'did not know [her]' and that, much

[1] Charlotte Brontë, Letter to Emily, 8 June 1839, in Margaret Smith (ed.), *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë with a selection of letters by family and friends*, Vol. I, 1829 – 1847 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 191.

to Brontë's dismay, it was very likely that Mrs Sidgwick '[did] not intend to know [her]'.[2] Despite a belief that her family's indirect acquaintance with the Sidgwicks would facilitate a more personal bond with her female employer and, declaring later to Ellen Nussey that she was 'determined' to make a 'friend' of Mrs Sidgwick, Brontë's attempts to establish a mutual bond of interest with her employer were met with rebuke and hostility.[3] Had Brontë known Harriet Martineau at this earlier stage in her life, one might speculate that the older woman would have left Brontë in no doubt whatsoever that any hope of befriending her female employer was both seriously misplaced and wholly inappropriate. In an article entitled 'The Governess' (1860), which responded to persistent concerns about the health and welfare of the domestic (or resident) governess in particular, Martineau not only argued that the governess literally had no hope of establishing an '*equal* friendship' with those in her new place of employment but, more significantly, had absolutely no right to hope for one: 'A close and equal friendship in the house *or* neighbourhood is an impossible blessing to a resident governess. With the mother it is out of the question […]; and with anyone else it is practically (and naturally) never tolerated'.[4] Martineau was by no means unsympathetic to the governess's seemingly inevitable experience of isolation and psychological deprivation, however. Applauding the recent (feminist instigated) developments at 19 Langham Place to provide the opportunity of half an hour's solitary repose and an affordable luncheon for 'working-ladies […] such as the daily governess', Martineau betrayed a hope that similar 'valuable' opportunities would be made available elsewhere for these women 'to meet for dinner' or to be able to 'keep one another in countenance'.[5] Notwithstanding Martineau's recognition of the importance of female companionship for governesses and other 'working-ladies', her optimistic vision of sequestered sociability, nevertheless, only serves to render even more explicit what Brontë's fictional governess, Mrs Pryor, had described as 'the invisible but rigid line which established the difference between [herself] and [her] employers', and which should 'never [be] transgress[ed]'.[6]

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[2] Brontë, Letter to Emily, 8 June 1839, in Smith (ed.), *The Letters*, Vol. I, p. 191.
[3] Brontë, Letter to Ellen Nussey, 30 June 1839, in Smith (ed.), *The Letters*, Vol. I, p. 193.
[4] Harriet Martineau, 'The Governess', in *Once a Week*, 3 (1860, Sept. 1), pp. 267-272, p. 270. My emphasis.
[5] Martineau, 'The Governess', pp. 268-269.
[6] Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 2009), p. 281. Much of Mrs Pryor's account of her life as a governess is taken directly from Lady Eastlake's (then Elizabeth Rigby) biting

Despite the recommendations, however, of contemporaries such as Martineau (or Lady Eastlake), boundaries between the social realms of the mid - nineteenth-century governess and her mistress were not always maintained. Kathryn Hughes's study, for example, has identified a number of instances in which the mistress of the family became an object of devotion for her female employee, prompting some advice writers to warn against the dangers of 'a kind of idolatry on the part of the governess'.[7] Indeed, on occasions a too ardent expression of affection by the governess for her female employer could ultimately prove costly. 'In some instances', Hughes claims, 'the atmosphere became so intense that steps had to be taken to end a situation that had begun to unsettle the whole household'.[8] A desire to transform a professional relationship into one of female friendship was not limited to the governess, however. Situated in similar circumstances of isolation, far from her own family and childhood society, the mistress of the home might, according to Hughes, come to regard her lonely governess as 'an obvious and natural confidante'.[9] Whether these relationships, based on a mutual yearning for adult female companionship, ever became balanced friendships is, nonetheless, something that Hughes suggests 'must remain doubtful'.[10] One such household, however, in which a *reciprocal* bond of affection was established between a mistress and her somewhat charismatic governess was that of the Kay-Shuttleworths, a family who had befriended Brontë after the highly successful publication of *Jane Eyre*. Given the isolation and neglect that Brontë had suffered whilst employed by Mrs Sidgwick, there is perhaps some irony in the fact that she was not only to meet and befriend, but also to find herself somewhat captivated by Lady Kay-Shuttleworth's governess, Rosa Poplawska. Notably, Brontë told Nussey that she found Poplawska an 'interesting girl whom [she] took to at once'.[11] According to Brontë the instant

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review of Brontë's *Jane Eyre* in the *Quarterly Review* (1847). So incensed was Brontë at Eastlake's disparaging comments that she wrote a sardonic response which she intended to include in the preface to *Shirley*. Brontë's publishers, Smith, Elder, however, persuaded her to not to include it. Mrs Pryor's account is therefore deployed instead as an indirect retaliation to Eastlake by Brontë.

[7] Mrs R. L. Devonshire, 'Resident Governesses' in *Parents' Review* 13 (November 1902), pp. 833-844, p.840; quoted in Kathryn Hughes, *The Victorian Governess* (London and Rio Grande: The Hambledon Press, 1993), pp. 113-114.

[8] Hughes, *The Victorian Governess*, p. 113.

[9] Hughes, *The Victorian Governess*, p. 113.

[10] Hughes, *The Victorian Governess*, p. 113.

[11] Brontë, Letter to Ellen Nussey, 19 March 1850 in Margaret Smith (ed.), *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë with a selection of letters by family and friends* 1848 – 1851, Vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 191.

attraction was mutual: 'She also instinctively took to me', Brontë told her friend.[12] However, although Brontë confessed to Nussey that 'in [her] heart, [she] liked [Poplawska] better than anything else in the house', this particular sentiment was not quite so mutual.[13] Four years after Brontë had first met Poplawska, the German governess departed her employer's residence with her mistress, Lady Kay-Shuttleworth, who chose to replace her husband and children with the constant attendance of Rosa, acting as paid companion. The couple spent the remainder of their lives together travelling abroad and 'wandering from spa to spa in pursuit of health for Lady [Kay] Shuttleworth'.[14]

Miss Weeton and the Georgian paradigm of female homosociality, 'class', and the working woman.

Another governess who, earlier in the century, established a close bond of amity with her first female employer and struggled to replicate this bond with her second mistress, and who provides a valuable paradigm with which to examine the significance of Victorian female friendship across class divides within the workplace, was Miss Ellen Weeton. Surprisingly, with perhaps the exception of Amanda Vickery's study of the Georgian gentlewoman, Weeton's detailed account of her life has at best received only passing attention from scholars.[15] Although briefly mentioned in Hughes's study, which includes an analysis of the emotional dilemmas faced by both the governess and her mistress, no mention is made of the complex friendship that developed between Weeton and Mrs Pedder, the step-mother of her first charge, Gertrude. Yet Weeton's journals and letter-books provide excellent sources from which to glean a direct insight into the difficulties and frustrations experienced by an impoverished genteel woman who attempted not only to gain financial security but also female companionship during the periods she worked as a governess. Importantly, however, as Vickery has noted, Weeton's autobiographical account is not immune from partiality. The account Weeton gives

[12] Brontë, Letter to Ellen Nussey, 19 March 1850 in Smith (ed.), *The Letters*, Vol. II, p. 191.
[13] Brontë, Letter to Ellen Nussey, 19 March 1850 in Smith (ed.), *The Letters*, Vol. II, p. 191.
[14] Winifred Gerin, *Charlotte Brontë: The Evolution of Genius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 425.
[15] Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998).

in her journal of her failed marriage and the 'represent[ation] [of] herself as a blameless wife, beset by the unwarranted abuses of a tyrant', Vickery suggests, should be read with some caution.[16] In fact, the absence from Weeton's letter-books of any reciprocated correspondence might be regarded as somewhat suspicious. Nonetheless, whilst only offering a one-sided account, the meticulously duplicated copies of Weeton's own correspondence document her immediate and, at times, unguarded responses to events as she experienced them at the time of occurrence. Having reviewed the first volumes of her letter-book in 1810, for instance, Weeton confessed in her journal that 'there appear[ed] some strange contradictions in the statements' of her letters.[17] Whilst she explains the inconsistency of her sentiments as being in part the result of a 'prudent' or discreet suppression of facts from certain 'friend[s] or acquaintance[s]', fundamentally Weeton justifies the contradictory nature of her correspondence by claiming that '[i]n the moment of strong feeling' she would 'think, speak, and write, what [her] cooler judgement afterwards condemn[ed]'.[18] However, even on occasions when she was less vulnerable to her own impassioned emotions, Weeton did not allow an awareness of the need to exercise a degree of discretion and the fear of causing offence to compromise (what she believed to be) the integrity of her autobiographical records. Unlike the female authors of lifewriting identified in Sharon Marcus's study, who openly shared the contents of their diaries, Weeton tenaciously guarded her journal entries from all but her beloved brother Tom, to whom she declared:

> For 3 or 4 years past I have taken copies of all my letters. […] I do not intend them to be seen whilst I live, for there is not one intimate acquaintance I have I could show them to, except you. I have spoken too freely of most of them, or their near connexions.[19]

Notwithstanding the obvious tendentious nature of Weeton's autobiographical account, her lifewritings are nevertheless particularly valuable historical documents.

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[16] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, pp. 78-79.
[17] Ellen Weeton, *Miss Weeton's "Journal of a Governess",* 1807-1811, Volume I (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1969). Reprint of "Miss Weeton: journal of a governess", 1808-1811, ed. Edward Hall (Oxford University Press: London, 1936), Journal entry, 30 July, 1810, p. 275.
[18] Weeton, *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, Journal entry, 30 July, 1810, p. 276.
[19] J.J. Bagley, 1969, 'Introduction' in Weeton, *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. xii. According to Bagley, for three years Weeton even managed to conceal the existence of her letter-books from her brother.

In refusing to permit them to become testimonies moderated by the feelings of others, Weeton presents us with the opportunity to examine an uncompromised and detailed account of how same-sex female friendships were experienced by a working woman of the 'middling' ranks during the early part of the nineteenth century.

Caution, however, has to be taken when equating the social identity of a working woman of the 'middling' ranks of late Georgian society (Weeton) with her latter-day middle-class Victorian counterpart. Roy Porter, for instance, has argued that, unlike the Victorians, eighteenth-century Georgians did not primarily identify themselves along lines of social class but defined themselves in terms of shared or competing interest groups. In addition to common denominators such as 'wealth [and] occupation', eighteenth-century contemporaries, Porter suggests, were equally likely to align themselves in terms of 'region, religion, [and] family'.[20] Despite the existence of a variety of social groupings, however, Porter nevertheless suggests that the structure of Georgian (English) society was 'precisely graded'.[21] The preservation of subtle 'distinctions' that established the 'status differentiation' between members within the lower or middle ranks, he argues, was of no less importance than those that defined the 'pecking order' within the upper echelons of society.[22] Conversely, however, although Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, in their influential historical study of the formation of the middle class, have also suggested that the middle strata of late eighteenth-century English society was 'criss-crossed by differences of interests and riven with internal dissension', they nevertheless argue that by the late Georgian era the once 'disparate membership' of the eighteenth-century middle ranks had 'coalesced' around shared commercial ambitions, moral and religious beliefs, and a rejection of the cultural values of a dissolute, landed aristocracy.[23] Significantly, Davidoff and Hall suggest that the middling ranks of the late Georgian period represented an embryonic form of the mid-Victorian middle-class. Consolidating this transition in social identity, they argue, was the gendered configuration of public and domestic realms prompted by

[20] Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, second edition (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 53.
[21] Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 49.
[22] Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 49.
[23] Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p. 18.

an evangelical revival that 'made a religious idiom the cultural norm for the middle class [of] the mid nineteenth century'.[24]

Amanda Vickery, however, has directly contested Davidoff and Hall's reading of the Georgian social order, not only by disputing the extent to which the landed elite and the middling ranks became ostracised from one another, but also by contesting claims of the apparent emergence and restriction of a sexual division of labour. More specifically, in her study of the lifewritings of three Yorkshire women from the upper echelons of the late Georgian middle ranks (in particular, that of Elizabeth Shackleton), Vickery demonstrates that, despite 'tensions' which were undoubtedly 'aligned along a land/trade divide', there existed a widespread 'social cohesion' and mobility between the landed elite and 'genteel' or 'polite' society; a social group she defines as being comprised of 'lesser landed gentlemen, attornies, doctors, clerics, merchants and manufacturers'.[25] Fundamentally, whilst arguing that a social order premised on separate spheres 'could be applied to any century or any culture', Vickery's study seeks to highlight the fact that these Yorkshire women played an important role in facilitating the social and commercial interests of a complex regional network, and that their lived experiences extended well beyond the constraints of domesticity.[26] 'Relations between land, trade and the professions', she argues, 'were not […] simply a matter of intermarriage, but also of daily social interactions'.[27] Notably, however, having distinguished between female sociability founded primarily upon business transactions and 'quintessential hospitality' (intrinsically social encounters), Vickery's research illustrates that some of Shackleton's 'quintessential hospitality' extended to working women from the lower echelons of the middle strata.[28] In fact, Vickery's research reveals that over two years Shackleton entertained local retailer Betty Hartley 'more times than she met or heard from many of the gentlewomen of her acquaintance'.[29] That this was not a unique example of female amity that crossed the boundaries of a social hierarchy is evidenced in the friendship between Miss Chorley, the daughter of a retired, wealthy

[24] Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 25.
[25] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, pp. 35, 13.
[26] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 7.
[27] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 23.
[28] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 27.
[29] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 27.

businessman, and the aforementioned Miss Weeton who, at the onset of their friendship, was working as a schoolmistress.

Whilst the existence of such bonds might suggest that expressions of female homosociality between the differing levels of the middle strata were not perhaps overly problematic during the late Georgian era, individuals nevertheless appear to have articulated, through such friendships, a consciousness of their own distinctive place in the social order. As Vickery highlights in her study, for instance, Shackleton's 'hospitality was no natural enemy of hierarchy' but the designation in her diary of 'Betty Hartley *Shopkeeper*' is nevertheless 'a rather smug acknowledgement' of her condescension.[30] Although Hartley's account of her hierarchical relationship with Shackleton is absent from Vickery's study, Weeton's early correspondence with Chorley suggests (perhaps not surprisingly) that hierarchical difference was most keenly felt by those women who occupied a less elevated place in the Georgian social order than their friends. Explaining to Chorley how the limitations of her 'confined [...] income' ultimately determined her modest aspirations for new lodgings, Weeton declared to her friend:

> After telling you all this, Miss Chorley, I am afraid the opinion of the world will deter you from noticing one who in part *earns* what they have. If it is so, it is only doing as perhaps I should myself – it is hard to know oneself.[31]

Notably, whilst Weeton's comments explicitly disclose her own sense of social inferiority (if not her sense of social indeterminacy as well) they also reveal the existence of social prejudices that Weeton does not (or cannot) completely exempt herself from sharing. Additionally, however, Weeton's anxious confession also reveals that whilst same-sex female friendship could, ostensibly at least, elide the boundaries of hierarchical difference, it could also simultaneously serve to heighten a latent awareness of social status. Although, as Vickery suggests, 'Weeton's social position was an ambiguous one' which 'she felt most sorely', Weeton was certainly not alone amongst her contemporaries in experiencing, through asymmetrical female homosociality, the discomfort of her own 'ambiguous' position.[32] Whilst working as

[30] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, pp. 27-28. My emphasis.
[31] Weeton, Letter to Miss Chorley, 24 June 1808, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 96. Weeton's emphasis.
[32] Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 381.

a governess, Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, found herself somewhat bewildered and not a little discomforted by the fact that she was attended with particular regard by her aristocratic mistress, Lady Caroline Kingsborough. Unlike her predecessor who 'had been treated as a servant', Wollstonecraft was regularly assimilated into aristocratic social circles on the insistence of Lady Caroline.[33] Although Wollstonecraft expressed some surprise that she was 'treated like a gentlewoman', the attention and regard that she received from her mistress which brought about this declaration, also prompted her to experience, like Weeton, a disconcerting awareness of both her 'inferior' and yet somewhat indeterminate 'station'.[34] More specifically, despite being 'treated like a gentlewoman', Wollstonecraft confessed: 'but I cannot easily forget my inferior station – and this something betwixt and between is rather awkward – it pushes me forward to notice'.[35]

Interestingly, Weeton and Wollstonecraft's experiences of asymmetrical homosociality appear, at times, to have become more akin to outright power struggles. Miss Weeton's relationship, for example, with the snobbish Chorley (which is discussed in more detail below) ultimately erupted into occasional bouts of physical aggression, something which, given her irrepressible amusement, Miss Chorley appeared to relish.[36]

Whilst such explicit manifestations of antagonism did not occur in Wollstonecraft's relationship with her mistress, Lady Caroline's prevalent fascination with Wollstonecraft and her frequent demands that her governess participate fully in aristocratic sociability, nevertheless, appears to have introduced a tense dynamic of homoerotic objectification into their rather unusual professional relationship. It was not uncommon, for instance, that Wollstonecraft was 'ordered' to accompany her mistress on social engagements and, as a result, found herself part of a group that was 'much admired' by 'people of fashion'.[37] On one occasion, however, Wollstonecraft refused 'to be stared at' by Lady Caroline and her drawing-

[33] Lyndall Gordon, *Vindication: A Life of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: Virago, 2006), p. 93.
[34] Mary Wollstonecraft, in Janet Todd (ed.), *The Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 87; quoted in Gordon, *Vindication*, p. 93.
[35] Wollstonecraft, in Todd (ed.), *The Collected Letters*, p. 87; quoted in Gordon, *Vindication*, p. 93.
[36] Weeton records in her journal that following their previous altercation over the privacy of her diaries Miss Chorley 'was laughing so loud, and talking so fast' that her mother, Mrs Chorley, became 'quite alarmed', Weeton, Journal entry, 4 December, 1808, in Weeton , *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, pp. 134, 133.
[37] Gordon, *Vindication*, p. 107; Wollstonecraft, quoted in Gordon, p. 112.

room circle.[38] When Wollstonecraft 'begged to be excused', her non-compliance initially provoked the fury of her mistress and her adamant refusal to acquiesce to Wollstonecraft's pleas.[39] However, despite being 'very angry', when confronted with the 'determined' Wollstonecraft, Lady Caroline eventually expressed remorse, apologised, and consented to allow her governess to absent herself.[40] Evidence that Wollstonecraft had become conscious of her powerful influence over her rather spellbound mistress might be noted in the comment she made not long after her 'satirical' performance of aristocratic femininity at a masquerade she was compelled to attend with Lady Caroline.[41] Whilst initially reluctant to accompany her mistress, Wollstonecraft became '*more* than half mad' with delight at having been presented with such 'an ample field for satire'.[42] In spite of Lady Caroline's continued enjoyment at placing her reluctant governess alongside herself (and effectively centre stage) in the company of an admiring aristocratic circle, Wollstonecraft was subsequently to claim that Lady Caroline had become 'afraid of me'.[43]

When compared with Martineau's discussion of mid-nineteenth-century 'working-ladies' or Brontë's fictional governess, Mrs Pryor in *Shirley*, who was regarded as 'a bore' by the 'ladies' and given to understand by her employers that she 'was not their equal', Wollstonecraft (and, perhaps to a lesser degree, Weeton) might at first appear in stark contrast to these Victorian examples.[44] Indeed, Jeanne Peterson and Mary Poovey have argued that it was specifically the crystallization of an acute class consciousness that took place during the mid-Victorian era which resulted in the figure of the domestic governess occupying a status of social incongruence. Poovey, for instance, has suggested that the proliferation of discourses concerning the plight of governesses, which emerged during the 1840s and 1850s, represented not so much a universal concern about these impoverished women's struggle to survive in an overcrowded and underpaid profession, but was indicative of anxieties regarding the contradiction embodied in a role that conflated the identities of the middle-class mother and the 'low-born, ignorant, and vulgar'

[38] Wollstonecraft, quoted in Gordon, *Vindication,* p. 108.
[39] Wollstonecraft, quoted in Gordon, p. 108.
[40] Wollstonecraft, quoted in Gordon, p. 108.
[41] Wollstonecraft, quoted in Gordon, p. 112.
[42] Wollstonecraft, quoted in Gordon, p. 112.
[43] Wollstonecraft, quoted in Gordon, p. 112.
[44] Brontë, *Shirley*, p. 281.

working-class woman.[45] Underlying these fears, Poovey suggests, was the question of the governess's moral integrity. As 'a teacher and example for young children', the governess consolidated, and was consolidated by, contemporary middle-class gender ideals of morality that were 'nurtured in the home as an effect of maternal instinct'.[46] Yet, according to Poovey, submerged in the debates regarding the emotional hardships incurred by the governesses were concerns generated by the significant numbers of these women being placed in lunatic asylums. Such concerns, Poovey suggests, prompted fears about the governess's psychological stability and, subsequently, the governess's own 'self-control' and 'sexual neutrality'.[47] Ultimately, according to Poovey, the governess, whilst being synonymous with the middle-class mother whose sexuality was mediated through maternal instinct, simultaneously became implicitly associated with the threatening figures of the lunatic, the fallen woman, and 'the sexualized and often working-class' woman.[48]

Peterson has also highlighted the governess's contradictory social identity and, like Poovey, has suggested that it was a consequence of middle-class gender ideals that emerged during the Victorian era. More specifically, Peterson argues that despite comparable social provenance and domestically located roles, the Victorian governess's (theoretical) right to assert social parity with her mistress was ultimately disqualified by 'the new [middle-class] ethos of the ideal woman' as a lady 'of leisure'.[49] Thus, although raised and educated in line with the same cultural values and situated in the home (occupied in a quasi-maternal role) the governess's status as a paid employee undermined any claims she might have had of identifying herself as a middle-class lady.

Although Peterson and Poovey demonstrate that the uncertainties which surrounded the ambiguous social identity of the governess were consolidated by an acute Victorian class consciousness, that the figure of the governess had previously inhabited a similarly uncertain and problematic social position earlier in the century can, nevertheless, be seen in the accounts Weeton gave of her second term of

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[45] Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (London: Virago Press, 1989), p. 128.
[46] Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, pp. 128-129.
[47] Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, p. 129.
[48] Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, p. 131.
[49] M. Jeanne Peterson, 'The Victorian Governess: Status Incongruence in Family and Society', in Martha Vicinus (ed)., *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1980), p. 5.

working as a governess for the Armitage family between 1812 and 1814. Writing to a friend not long after arriving at the Armitage residence, for instance, Weeton defined the 'rather […] awkward' social position of a '*governess*' as being one of near total exclusion.[50] Whilst 'not choosing to associate with servants', and 'not being treated as an equal', either by family or 'visiters' [sic], the governess, Weeton declared, was 'almost shut out of society'.[51] Despite this admission, however, Weeton struggled to come to terms with the reality of her own incongruent status within the Armitage home. Lamenting the absence of any warm congeniality between her mistress and herself, Weeton initially attributed Mrs Armitage's reserve to her own hypersensitivity at being a paid employee and, therefore, 'in truth, a servant'.[52] Yet , like Charlotte Brontë who, twenty-seven years later, had to 'look on' despondently from the margins 'of grand folk's society' in the Sidgwick home, Weeton expresses a deep sense of resentment at being denied the opportunity to participate fully in the Armitage family's social life.[53] Particularly aggravating for Weeton was the fact that her presence during social and family gatherings was only partially welcome. Whilst she was invited to 'dine or drink tea' with family guests, she nevertheless complained that she was 'obliged' to remove herself 'immediately after' and was therefore ultimately deprived of the chance to socialise with these guests: 'I may truly be said to see little of them' she complained.[54] Similarly, Weeton found objectionable her limited inclusion in family gatherings. Although, by her own admission, she was 'frequently' invited to accompany her mistress to take tea or supper with the Armitages senior, these visits, she (incredulously) complained, proved to be somewhat disrupted by having to attend to the Armitage children.[55] Accompanying the obvious longing for adult company she expresses in her complaints, however, is Weeton's recognition that her intermittent participation in, rather than complete absence from the Armitages' social life only emphasised further her unequal status. 'As long as a governess, or any other person, is admitted

[50] Weeton, Letter to Mrs Dodson, 18 August, 1812, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. II, p. 62. Weeton's emphasis.
[51] Weeton, Letter to Mrs Dodson, 18 August, 1812, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. II, p. 62.
[52] Weeton Letter to Miss Winkley, 15 October 1812, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. II, p. 66.
[53] Brontë, Letter to Emily J. Brontë, 8 June 1839, in Smith (ed.), *The Letters*, Vol. I, p. 191.
[54] Weeton, Letter to Mrs Price, (?) July, 1812, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. II, p. 58.
[55] Weeton, Letter to Miss Winkley, 8 April 1813, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. II, p. 85.

into the company of her superiors', Weeton declared, 'she should be treated as an equal for the time, or else it is better not to invite her at all'.[56]

Underlying and exacerbating Weeton's faltering attempts to clarify her unstable social position within the Armitage home, however, were her endeavours to negotiate a rather more personal relationship with her mistress. That is to say, like her more famous Victorian counterpart Charlotte Brontë, Weeton's accounts reveal that she harboured a continued, although not unproblematic desire to establish a warm bond of female amity with her employer. Despite, for example, contradicting an earlier assessment of her relationship with her mistress by claiming that it was in fact Mrs Armitage's demeanour which 'threw a cool reserve into [her own] conduct', Weeton was delighted to recount that: 'All at once, [Mrs Armitage] has become pleasing and open […], and treats me in a manner that has, as suddenly, banished my reserve'.[57] Similarly, in having overcome her mistress's 'sour' disapproval at her endeavours to physically punish one of the Armitage daughters, Weeton was equally delighted to declare to her friend that Mrs Armitage had become 'not only tractable, but affectionate'.[58] That Mrs Armitage was fond of her governess is perhaps beyond question. Weeton certainly felt confident enough to confess in a letter she wrote to her mistress that as a practical joke she had attempted to 'pass [her]self off' as the Armitage children's 'Mamma'.[59] Given that Weeton leaves no record of a resultant rebuke, something she would have almost certainly done, it would seem that Weeton's relationship with Mrs Armitage was sufficiently cordial for her employer not to have taken offence. It was, however, an explicit declaration of affection by Mrs Armitage that Weeton appears to have sought.

Perhaps surprisingly, given her sensitivity regarding her inferior place within the household, Weeton's efforts to solicit an intimate bond with her mistress were not made by trying to elide her role as governess but by repeated attempts to bring that fact to her mistress's attention. Recurrent complaints that her employers and, in particular, Mrs Armitage, displayed only a 'trifling' interest in the children's progress undoubtedly testify to Weeton's endeavours to bolster her own self-esteem.[60] Indeed, Weeton took it upon herself to subject her employers to a 'weekly

[56] Weeton, Letter to Miss Winkley, 8 April 1812, in *Journal of a Governess,* Vol. II, p. 85.
[57] Weeton, Letter to Mrs Price, 3 April 1813, in *Journal of a Governess,* Vol. II, p. 83.
[58] Weeton, Letter to Mrs Price, 4 September 1813, in *Journal of a Governess,* Vol. II, p. 100.
[59] Weeton, Letter to Mrs Armitage, 28 May 1813, in *Journal of a Governess,* Vol. II, p. 90.
[60] Weeton, Letter to Miss Winkley, 14 January 1813, in *Journal of a Governess,* Vol. II, p. 72.

account […] every Saturday'.[61] Yet when Mrs Armitage finally acknowledged her admiration for her governess's abilities, Weeton's elated response can be seen to betray the emotional investment she had made in her professional relationship with her employer. Initially Weeton had told a friend that she 'began to like Mrs A.', but then qualified this admission by claiming that her employer was not someone whom she would like to make 'a confidential friend' because, she claimed, her mistress was incapable of 'feeling warmly for anyone'.[62] When, however, Weeton was preparing to leave the Armitages' employment, to live with a recently bereaved uncle, her mistress paid Weeton the double compliment of acknowledging that her governess had brought about a 'wonderful improvement' in the children and that, effectively, Weeton's services were indispensable. Although only referring to Weeton's professional conduct and abilities, the effect upon Weeton is particularly striking. Complaints of being 'totally shut out' from any form of companionship or society, made only five days previously to Miss Winkley, were completely eclipsed by Weeton's later disclosure to another friend, Miss Braithwaite, of how highly appreciated her endeavours had been.[63] In the accompanying account she gives to Braithwaite, Weeton jubilantly declares: 'My health is restored again, and my spirits too. Mrs A. treats me more and more pleasingly as time passes on; we are almost like two familiar friends, and many a piece of would-be wit passes between us'.[64]

Notably, the apparently paradoxical nature of Weeton's attempt to conflate female amity with her working relationship with Mrs Armitage can be seen to have been shaped by her previous experience of working as a governess for the Pedder family, during which time Weeton developed a strong bond of affection for her young mistress. Equally formative, however, is the level of emotional deprivation Weeton experienced as a result of her family's economic and social decline which appears in part to have prompted recognition of the opportunity made available by work to establish important emotional bonds with other women. After having been compelled from the age of twelve to undertake the management of the family's home whilst her widowed mother ran the local day-school, Miss Weeton found herself somewhat 'peculiarly situated' within the social hierarchy of Up-Holland, where her mother had settled after the premature death of her husband, Captain

[61] Weeton, Letter to Miss Winkley, 14 January 1813, *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. II, p. 72.
[62] Weeton, Letter to Mrs Price, 12 December 1813, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. II, p. 71.
[63] Weeton, Letter to Miss Winkley, 27 November 1813, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. II, p. 106.
[64] Weeton, Letter to Miss Braithwaite, 2 December 1813, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. II, p. 71.

Weeton.[65] Other than her beloved younger brother, Tom, who was sent away to study at a nearby boarding school, Miss Weeton's adolescence was utterly devoid of the companionship of either sex. Most notably lamented by Weeton was, however, the dearth of female friendship. Whilst Tom's intermittent presence at home was valued above anyone else's, Weeton nonetheless confessed that she '*never* had a proper companion'; that is to say, 'a female one'.[66] Although the combination of relentless domestic demands and Weeton's innate shyness undoubtedly served to help isolate her, of considerable detriment to her bonds with other young women was the problematic issue of her social status. With neither the inclination nor her mother's permission to associate with the young women of her own age who had been brought up 'rudely and vulgarly', Weeton's only direct opportunity for female amity was through the acquaintance of a nearby wealthy clergyman's daughters, the Misses Prescott.[67] Despite her mother's attempts, however, over a number of years to 'cultivate an intimacy' on Ellen Weeton's behalf, as the daughter of a schoolmistress, Weeton was repeatedly obliged by the Prescott sisters to acknowledge their 'superior rank' and, at times, endure the indignity of their often explicit insults.[68] Following her brother's permanent departure from the maternal home and then, later, her mother's death in 1797, Weeton was to suffer further social rejection on account of her impoverished appearance. What 'genteel acquaintance[s]' she had managed to form were 'lost […] owing to the shabbiness of [her] dress'.[69] Such associates, Weeton confessed, were too 'ashamed to be seen with [her]'.[70] In fact, Weeton's isolation increased to such an extent that at times her loneliness transformed into elongated bouts of morbid depression: 'I thought so much on death, I at length became inured to it; […] I most earnestly wished to die – and if I had, I might have lain and grown putrid many days before anyone would have known'.[71]

Despite gradual improvements both to her economic and social circumstances, Weeton decided, after having spent two decades 'CHAINED TO ONE SPOT', that she would finally remove herself from both the responsibility of running

[65] Weeton, 'A Retrospect' in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 20.
[66] Weeton, 'A Retrospect' in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 21. Weeton's emphasis.
[67] Weeton, 'A Retrospect' in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 21.
[68] Weeton, 'A Retrospect' in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 21.
[69] Weeton, 'A Retrospect' in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 33.
[70] Weeton, 'A Retrospect' in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 33.
[71] Weeton, 'A Retrospect' in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 28.

her late mother's school and Up-Holland itself.[72] Having initially made enquiries (albeit unsuccessfully) after a number of other possible teaching opportunities, she and her brother eventually decided, in 1808, that she 'might live [modestly] upon her income' rather than pursue alternative employment.[73] Notably, however, Weeton's aborted endeavours to find suitable work suggest that her motives were not chiefly directed by economic necessity, but rather emotional privation. Despite her family's snobbish disapproval, Weeton expressed a clear preference to work as a subordinate teacher in Miss Magnall's Academy for Girls, a boarding school in Crofton, rather than take a lease on another day school in Liverpool. Although the latter situation had originally been suggested by her brother, on whose self-interested advice Weeton had frequently acted, she was by no means disappointed at the failure of her application: 'To tell thee the truth, Tom, I was not sorry that the L. situation was occupied. I did not like the Idea [sic] of living by myself or in lodgings'.[74] Indeed, Weeton had already emphasised the emotional deficiency of such a situation in an earlier letter she wrote to her brother: 'If I had a school in Liverpool […] what better should I be? I should live in a house by myself still. Let me at least feel the contrast'.[75] Weeton was noticeably far more enthusiastic, however, about the possibility of working for Miss Magnall. In fact, regardless of the misgivings of both her brother and sister-in-law, Weeton's letters reveal that she had a strong inclination not only to work for Miss Magnall but any other mistress of a school who may have required an 'assistant' at that time: 'I'll shall try the other plan first, if Miss M. should want an assistant; and if not, someone else may'.[76] Moreover, so eager was Weeton to remove herself from seclusion that, upon an agreement of engagement, she was prepared to relinquish the opportunity of first securing an income from the tenancy of her home in Up-Holland and 'go', without delay, 'anytime as soon as [Miss Magnall] wished'.[77] Although Weeton's correspondence does not explicitly relay a belief that the particular position of an under-school mistress in a boarding school would enable her to establish close social bonds with other women, her attempts to justify the pursuit of such a role certainly

[72] Weeton, Letter to Tom Weeton, (?) April, 1808, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 81. Weeton's capitalization.
[73] Weeton, Letter to Mrs Whitehead, 9, June, 1808, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 90.
[74] Weeton, Letter to Tom Weeton, 3 March, 1808, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 73.
[75] Weeton, Letter to Tom Weeton, 14 January, 1808, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 64.
[76] Weeton, Letter to Tom Weeton, 3 March, 1808, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 73.
[77] Weeton, Letter to Tom Weeton, 3 March, 1808, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 73.

reveal that she was, at least in part, motivated by a desire for female intimacy. Not only did she 'wish to see a little more of the world' but she also longed for companionship.[78] As she explained to her brother: 'I cannot be contented to be *always* alone'.[79]

Whilst unsuccessful in her attempts to secure a position in a genteel school for girls, and therefore failing to find the much longed for companionship, subsequent employment as a governess for Mrs Pedder appears to have more than compensated for this emotional loss. Although Weeton's relationship with her mistress had much less disruptive consequences for her employer's household than the relationship between Rosa Poplawska and Lady Kay Shuttleworth, her friendship with Mrs Pedder was nevertheless rather remarkable in that their respective social identities became completely destabilised. Whilst Weeton had principally been employed by the Pedders to teach their daughter, she had also been engaged to 'have […] under [her] care' Mrs Pedder because, as Weeton explained to a friend, 'Mr Pedder had married his servant'.[80] Whilst Kathryn Hughes, although not referring to Weeton, has suggested that some governesses found sanctuary from their own reduced social status when they were employed by a highly-placed family, Hughes also notes that this gentility by association could 'turn into the deep scorn of disappointment when an employer's social origins turned out to be less than impeccable'.[81] For Weeton, however, the reverse seems to have taken place. The fact that the seventeen-year-old Mrs Pedder had once been a dairy maid appears to have bolstered Weeton's status and, arguably, to have provided an additional means by which, theoretically, at least, she could usurp the position of her female employer. In addition to having to attend to the preparation of Mrs Pedder's entrance into polite society, Weeton was also given the additional responsibility of the 'proper direction and management of the servants and the household'.[82] Thus, Weeton effectively became situated in the role of the mistress of the home. Moreover, unlike one governess who expressed her relief at no longer working for a family whose 'connexions were nothing to boast of', Weeton harboured no such

[78] Weeton, Letter to Tom Weeton, 3 March, 1808, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 72.
[79] Weeton, Letter to Tom Weeton, 3 March, 1808, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 72. Weeton's emphasis.
[80] Weeton, Letter to Miss Chorley, 18 January, 1810 in *Journal of a Governess* Vol. I, pp. 218-219.
[81] Hughes, *The Victorian Governess*, p. 91.
[82] Weeton, Letter to Tom Weeton, 25 December 1809 in *Journal of a Governess* Vol. I, p. 211.

resentments.[83] In fact, Weeton was totally captivated by her employer/pupil. She not only allowed Mrs Pedder to give up some of her studies and colluded with her in concealing this fact from Mr Pedder, but she also frequently praised her female employer's 'sweet temper' and her attractive appearance: 'Mrs P. is […] a very pretty, I may say handsome, woman. The pleasing expression of her countenance, more than her beauty, pleases me'.[84]

The increasing bouts of Mr Pedder's hostility towards all the inmates of the household, however, soured Weeton's time in their employment, causing her on occasions to contemplate seeking a position elsewhere. In fact, towards the end of her engagement in the Pedder household, when Mr Pedder's temperament appears to have become increasingly unpredictable and volatile, Weeton deliberately let it be known to her employers that she was giving serious consideration to the possibility of leaving. Yet Weeton appears to have been highly reluctant to leave this 'most astonishing woman'.[85] Moreover, the reluctance to separate seems to have been mutual, prompting Weeton to confess openly her affection for Mrs Pedder in a letter to her brother, Tom: 'It is settled, however, that I remain. I believe he [Mr Peddler] really wishes me to stay. Mrs P. does emphatically. I love her dearly'.[86]

Whilst Weeton might be regarded as something of an anomaly, her journal records and letters nevertheless indicate that class boundaries were not *always*, as Martineau argued, insurmountable obstacles to the formation of ardent female friendships in the workplace. Arguably, Weeton's lifewriting therefore also suggests that possible attempts were made by other working women to translate their commitment to the ideals of female amity Sharon Marcus has so compellingly argued were of central importance to mainstream Victorian femininity. In making this claim, however, consideration has to be given to the fact that Marcus presents a comprehensive study of women's same-sex bonds in terms of their significance to Victorian ideals of marriage and family. Nevertheless, given Marcus's persuasive argument that Victorian female homosociality was not only a potent and formative agent of dominant middle-class heteronormative ideology, but that it was literally 'compulsory', one has to suggest that its influence had the potential to be felt

[83] Elizabeth Ham, *By Herself*, (ed.) Eric Gillet (London, 1945), p. 204, in Hughes, *The Victorian Governess*, p. 92.
[84] Weeton, Letter to Miss Winkley, 28 December, 1809 in *Journal of a Governess* Vol. I, p. 219.
[85] Weeton, Letter to Mrs Whitehead, 18 October, 1810 in *Journal of a Governess* Vol. I, p. 310.
[86] Weeton, Letter to Tom Weeton, 15 October, 1810 in *Journal of a Governess* Vol. I, p. 309.

throughout all the middle sectors of society. Consequently, in the following section, an outline is given regarding the important claims made by Marcus's study. Some of these claims will then be briefly discussed in terms of alternative contexts of middle-class femininity in order to explore how working women from the middle stratum of society, like Miss Weeton and Charlotte Brontë, engaged with the ideals of Victorian same-sex female friendship that are discussed by Marcus.

Sharon Marcus, female homosociality and the Victorian middle-class woman

Marcus's pioneering claims regarding the major contribution made by same-sex female friendship to the supreme middle-class ideal of Victorian marriage have significantly re-orientated both existing theoretical and historical understandings about the correlation between the homosocial bonds of these women and the dominant heterosexual economy in which they existed. Marcus has noted, as we have seen, that Adrienne Rich's highly influential concept of a lesbian continuum has not only rendered indistinct from one another the social and sexual dynamics of bonds amongst women, but also problematically posited the idea that 'all forms of female intimacy would be related by their common rejection of "compulsory heterosexuality"' (BW, p. 10). Similarly, whilst acknowledging the important and influential claims made in Carroll Smith-Rosenberg's own pioneering historical study of nineteenth-century (American) women's same-sex domestic bonds, Marcus ultimately rejects the fundamental argument of this study because it suggests that intimacy between women was both surrogate and sequestered. Smith-Rosenberg, Marcus argues, 'saw female friendships as compensatory, valued because they supplied the emotional warmth missing between wives and husbands in a society premised on separate gender spheres' (BW, p. 30). In contrast, therefore, to trans-historical claims that same-sex female bonding exemplifies a subversive and marginal status within a patriarchal society and the 'ongoing dominance of the continuum and minority paradigms' forwarded by queer theorists, Marcus argues that intimate bonds between Victorian women were absolutely central to the ideals of family and marriage (BW, p. 13). In particular, she suggests that ardent and intimate same-sex female friendship came to be regarded as both an integral and

somewhat liberating component of mainstream middle-class femininity during the period between 1830 and 1880.

Drawing primarily upon the didactic conduct literature of Sarah Ellis to read literally hundreds of journals, letters and diaries written by women during this period, Marcus suggests that female amity was not only a socially sanctioned space in which women could overtly indulge in an (homo)erotics of objectifying, tactile and competitive behaviour hitherto denied them in their relationships with men, but was also discursively constructed in terms of both its utility to and *development* of companionate heterosexual marriage. Through the highly popular and influential conduct literature of Sarah Ellis, for example, Marcus claims that same-sex female friendship was depicted as being the means by which the qualities women were expected to possess and demonstrate, in order to successfully fulfil their roles as wives, were developed. Victorians both acknowledged and promoted friendships between women, Marcus argues, 'because they believed it cultivated the feminine virtues of sympathy and altruism that made women into good helpmates' (BW, p. 26). However, whilst female friendship reinforced women's femininity through its association with compassion and compliance, it also undermined essentialist notions of gender which enabled the transformation of the institute of (middle and upper-class) marriage from a concept previously founded upon economic and social aspiration to 'a more egalitarian conception' of a companionate relationship between husbands and wives which was modelled on female amity (BW, p. 26). More specifically, Marcus argues that whilst marriage was ostensibly defined by heterosexual difference, it was nevertheless considered (by 1830) to be the model of a 'union of soul mates' and, as such was frequently regarded as being analogous with the ideals of female friendship (BW, p. 6). Notably, according to Marcus, this mapping of the feminine ideal of friendship (clearly defined as a perfectly balanced and mutually reinforcing transference of selflessness between women) onto the model of marriage, places the husband in two simultaneously existing roles: that of the literal (male) husband; and that of a figurative (female) friend. '[B]oth husband and wife' Marcus suggests, 'develop traits associated with feminine forms of sociability' (BW, p. 87). The ease with which these two gendered roles overlapped, and, in particular, the means by which a husband was equated with his wife's female friend registers a seemingly fluid equilibrium of 'sexual interchangeability' that

Marcus defines as the 'productive paradox at the heart of companionate marriage' (BW, p. 91).

In order to evidence such a claim, Marcus offers a persuasive reading of Ellis's discussion of female friendship in *The Women of England*. Emphasising the difficulties of determining any clear distinction between Ellis's conception of the ideal bonds between women and those of husband and wife, Marcus argues: 'what begins as a discussion of friendship between women blurs almost imperceptibly into a peroration on marriage between women and men' (BW, p. 40). In addition to promoting feminine virtues in both women and men, which were seemingly indispensable for the transformation of nineteenth-century marriage, Marcus suggests that female friendships were also culturally valued for two other influential qualities. Firstly, by facilitating introductions, courtship and marriage proposals, female friends actively promoted and reinforced contemporary middle-class beliefs regarding the supreme importance of women's matrimonial destiny. However, whilst directly functioning to advance the interests of a dominant heterosexual economy, these friendships also, according to Marcus, performed (almost literally) the additional task of emphasising social boundaries and 'consolidat[ing] class status' (BW, p. 26). In fact, Marcus suggests that female friendship 'became a luxury good' that symbolised a woman's membership within the affluent middle-classes (BW, p. 69). Unlike working-class women, whose investment in female friendships was 'primarily' predicated on the 'search for work and shelter', middle-class female friendship provided the means by which women could explicitly demonstrate that they were sufficiently prosperous enough to devote themselves entirely to a friendship that had in no way been cultivated on the basis of self-interest (BW, p. 69). A woman who had an intimate female friend, Marcus argues, could 'display' she was able to 'afford to lavish time and attention on someone who did not directly promote her interests' (BW, p. 69).

Marcus's study, therefore, demonstrates that same-sex female intimacy was an integral component of mainstream Victorian femininity and, moreover, was both a potent and formative agent of dominant middle-class heteronormative ideology. Compelling as it is, however, Marcus's argument is somewhat undermined by its rather incomplete representation of the middle class. Consequently, Marcus overlooks the complexities of same-sex friendships formed by women who were

situated differently within a social stratum that was far more variegated and contested than her representations seem to imply. Although she briefly notes the difficulties experienced, as well as the supplementary motives of mutual support prompted by necessity which shaped friendships amongst working-class women, Marcus's study takes little account of the possible obstacles or pressures many women from the middle *classes* may have had to negotiate in order to establish intimate bonds with other women. In the 1840s, for example, a decade in which there was a combination of rising numbers of bankruptcies and an increasing discrepancy between the number of marriageable women and prospective husbands, many middle-class women, like the Brontë sisters, found themselves compelled to seek 'respectable' or 'socially acceptable' work outside their homes, such as a lady's paid companion or governess, in order to financially support themselves and, on many occasions, their families also.[87] Thus, by defining working-class women's friendship primarily as a 'shared struggle' for employment and contrasting this with the concept of middle-class female amity as a 'luxury good', Marcus appears to incorrectly imply that the middle class was a homogenously affluent (and therefore leisured) stable social category immune from both the internal tensions of snobbery and the vicissitudes of economic and industrial development (BW, p. 69). Given her centrality to Marcus's study, however, it is perhaps important to note that Sarah Ellis defined the middle-class woman as someone who was 'connected with trade and manufactures' or who was the wife or daughter of a 'professional man of limited income'.[88] Even this description, however, as Ellis admits, could not be considered to be absolute or definitive; there were, she claimed, 'many deviations' that arose from 'the indefinite order of rank and station'.[89] That is to say, being so greatly dependent upon the prosperity generated by commerce and industry, social status, Ellis warned, was completely reliant upon a fluctuating and unpredictable economy. Whilst the acquisition of wealth might result, for a time, in the 'advancement to aristocratic dignity', a reversal of economic fortune, she argued, could quickly reduce even the most affluent to having 'to mingle with the laborious poor'.[90] Rather

[87] Hughes, *The Victorian Governess*, p. 117; Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, pp.126-127: Poovey notes that widowhood and late marriage were also contributory factors in exacerbating a burgeoning need for middle-class women to find 'socially acceptable' employment outside of their homes.
[88] Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Women of England: Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits* (London: Fisher, Son & Co., 1839), pp. 13, 19.
[89] Ellis, *The Women of England*, p. 19.
[90] Ellis, *The Women of England*, p. 20.

pessimistically, the premise of Ellis's advice was to 'enable all women to sink gracefully' without complaint should they find themselves reduced to 'a lower grade of society'.[91] In order to achieve this, and eliminate the emergent tendency toward indolence and indulgence she regarded as being manifest in a new generation of young middle-class 'ladies', Ellis claimed it was necessary to (re-) establish the same sense of unremitting practical duty their foremothers had possessed; namely the relentless '*habits* of industry and personal exertion'.[92] The middle-class woman, therefore, according to Ellis, was burdened with both the uncertainty of her economic and, therefore, social position, and the assiduous responsibilities of daily domestic labour. Martha Vicinus has suggested that it was economic and familial constraints placed upon women throughout the whole social spectrum which were the two most prevalent impediments to female same-sex bonds, and that women 'from all social classes had to balance economic necessity, family obligations, with personal wishes'.[93] Nevertheless, this would seem to be particularly true of the middle-class woman Ellis identifies.

Whilst Ellis's advice, however, emphasised the transient nature of a place within the middle class to justify her feminine doctrine of inexorable domestic industriousness, the middle class was also discursively constructed as an anxiously heterogeneous social environment (as Ellis's comments would seem to imply). As both Bronwyn Rivers and, in particular, Elizabeth Langland have noted, the increased proliferation of nineteenth-century conduct and advice literature, principally targeted at women, testifies to a broad spectrum of various social and economic circumstances that were both acknowledged and contested as part of an ongoing process to define the boundaries of and within the middle class. Whilst Langland, for instance, argues that discursively produced femininity was principally deployed to erect barriers against potentially upwardly-mobile working-class women, she nevertheless draws attention to the fact that middle-class society was itself becoming increasingly stratified and regulated. Genteel society, she argues, 'was sliced and sliced again to extremely thin layers, subtly separated from each

[91] Ellis, *The Women of England*, p. 20.
[92] Ellis, *The Women of England*, p. 18. Ellis's emphasis.
[93] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. xvi.

other by the delicate but infinitely resistant lines of snobbery'.[94] Notably, Langland's study highlights the fact that it was the discursive constructs of femininity that were used to establish and police the increasing number of internal sub-divisions within genteel society through the 'manipulation of social signs'.[95] The utilization of feminine display was by no means limited to the more affluent members of the middle classes however. Bronwyn Rivers, for example, has argued that it was far from exceptional for the writers of domestic advice manuals to encourage a display of '*false* affluence' because many middle-class households found it increasingly difficult 'to maintain their [social] position in the face of the rising standard of living'.[96] Although Sarah Ellis condemned 'false notions of refinement', Rivers notes in particular that advice manuals such as John Walsh's *A Manual of Domestic Economy: Suited to Families Spending from £100 to £1000 a Year* (1857) and Mrs Warren's *How I Managed My House on Two Hundred Pounds a Year* (1864), which sold thirty-six thousand copies in its first year of publication, evidence a considerable section of the middle class, anxious 'to maintain [the façade of] a particular lifestyle on a limited budget'.[97] According to the advice given by Mrs Warren, for example, it was possible, 'by [the] close attention to *trifles*', for the mistress of the home not only to '*appear* a very liberal housekeeper' but to earn for herself the 'gratuitous title' of 'extravagant'.[98]

Given that Marcus explicitly claims female friendship consolidated class status, it might be suggested that these bonds may also have been *utilised* in a similarly 'duplicitous' way by less affluent women attempting to outwardly maintain the appearance of membership to the middle-classes.[99] In particular, Marcus argues that sentimental friendships, culturally promoted as an emotional 'form of labour' which was distinct from 'waged employment', 'paradoxically' provided women with opportunities to 'display' their 'freedom from instrumental relationships' such as the 'survival networks' of 'working women' or the self-promoting 'social elite

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[94] Elizabeth Langland, *Nobody's Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 26; Langland quoting Lawrence Stone and Jeanne Stone, *An Open Elite? England 1540-1880* (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 423.
[95] Langland, *Nobody's Angels*, p. 26.
[96] Bronwyn Rivers, *Women at Work in the Victorian Novel: The Question of Middle-Class Women's Employment, 1840-1870* (New York and London: Edwin Mellor Press, 2005), pp. 49-50. Rivers's emphasis.
[97] Ellis, *The Women of England*, p. 15; Rivers, *Women at Work*, p. 50.
[98] Mrs [Eliza] Warren, *How I Managed My House on Two Hundred Pounds a Year* (London, 1864), p. 82; quoted in Rivers, *Women at Work*, p. 50.
[99] Rivers, *Women at Work*, p. 51.

networks' of upper-class women (BW, p. 69). As a 'social sign', therefore, female friendship might then have been no less open to 'manipulation' and, as such, afforded the less affluent members of the middle classes the opportunity to affirm their hitherto precarious social status. Arguably, Charlotte Brontë endeavoured to do precisely this when she accepted the offer of friendship extended to her by the Carter family, neighbours of the Sidgwicks, for whom Brontë was working as a governess at that time. That Brontë, after having had all of her previous offers of friendship to Mrs Sidgwick repeatedly rejected, may have found some level of companionship with Mrs Carter is suggested in her claim to her sister, Emily, that she was developing 'quite […] a regard for the Carter family'.[100] Interestingly, however, Brontë also pointedly admitted to her sister that ordinarily she would have declined the opportunity to make an acquaintance with this family: 'At home I should not care for them, but here they are friends'.[101] Undoubtedly, Brontë's decision to engage in a friendship with the Carters would have primarily been motivated by her isolated and unhappy existence at the Sidgwicks' home. However, given also that the Brontë family's indirect acquaintance with the Sidgwicks had 'aroused expectations' in Charlotte that her relationship with Mrs Sidgwick would be conducted along lines more in keeping with social parity, rather than in the context of a hierarchical dyad of employer/employee, association with the Carters would also provide an opportunity for Brontë to socialise on relatively equal terms with a well-placed family, thus bolstering her genteel status at a time when she felt that it was being completely denied or even possibly slighted.[102] Marcus's claims, however, would appear to resist any suggestion that a demonstration of friendship between middle-class women was deliberately exploited to 'construct an identity'.[103] Whilst it was upper-class women, for example, who, according to Marcus, 'vaunted acquaintances' to highlight 'membership in elite social networks', middle-class women, she claims, 'were the social stratum most prone to emphasize friendship as a matter of sheer emotion' which 'was based purely on affinity and affection' (BW, pp. 69, 70). Yet Marcus fails to consider the possibility that an *emphasis* on friendship is itself a form of display which could be used by women to signal their membership to the middle class.

[100] Brontë, Letter to Emily J. Brontë, 8 June 1839, in Smith (ed.), *The Letters*, Vol. I, p. 191.
[101] Brontë, Letter to Emily, 8 June 1839, in Smith (ed.), *The Letters*, Vol. I, p. 191.
[102] Gérin, *Evolution of Genius*, p. 142.
[103] Langland, *Nobody's Angels*, p. 24.

Consequently, at times it is somewhat difficult to reconcile Marcus's reading of middle-class women with the women who were varyingly burdened with domestic duties and cultural practices associated with a diverse range of positions that coexisted across the middle-class spectrum. There appears to be comparatively little similarity between, for example, Ellis's idealised version of the unrelentingly industrious wife or daughter of a household maintained on a modest income, with Marcus's depiction of the affluent middle-class woman who, having supposedly modelled her conduct on the practical didacticism of Ellis, indulged in a 'lavish' 'display' of 'sheer emotion'. That such women formed part of middle-class society is perhaps without doubt. Sarah Ellis, for example, in her discussion of female friendship, had felt compelled to counsel against what she saw as the impulsive exhibitions of affection between young women:

> In speaking of a mutual interchange of tokens of affection being essential to the vitality of friendship, I am far from including under this head, those expressions of endearment which are sometimes used […], so indiscriminately […]. Indeed, I am not quite sure that terms of endearment made use of as a matter of course, are desirable under any circumstances.[104]

Principally, Marcus's argument appears to circumscribe its focus upon what could be more accurately termed upper middle-class women. Subsequently her study overlooks the various identities and roles of women who constituted the broad category of the middle ranks of society. In so doing, however, her discussion of female same-sex friendships, although enormously significant, ultimately fails to ask questions about the ways in which the variety of social contexts and circumstances of women from the middle classes may have shaped or been shaped by an adherence to the ideals of female amity. For instance, did women from differing sectors of the middle classes form intense, ardent, or passionate bonds with one another; or was this too problematic for them? Ellis, although not condemning completely out-of-hand, had advised against such friendships on the basis that, like all 'unequal' relationships, these types of friendships would ultimately result in disappointment or even animosity.

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[104] Ellis, *The Daughters of England*, p. 286.

Interestingly, Miss Weeton's account of her friendship with Miss Chorley, which cooled dramatically after a number of aggressive episodes between the two women, would appear, ostensibly at least, to have provided a sufficient basis for Ellis's later recommendation. Miss Chorley, the daughter of a retired tanner living in Liverpool, had initially befriended Miss Weeton during 'a period of great distress' for the latter (in approximately 1804), and had attempted, along with a number of Weeton's other friends and relations to find her a 'comfortable situation' as a governess in a 'genteel school' for girls.[105] But Miss Weeton also benefited from this friendship in ways other than practical attempts to help her find suitable employment. Although acutely class conscious, Weeton was by no means a snob or a ruthless social aspirant. Nonetheless, she discovered (seemingly inadvertently) that Chorley's friendship offered a welcome and advantageous means to occasionally enter into polite society. Consequently Weeton enjoyed a sense of her own falsely elevated social status. In a letter she wrote to her brother, Weeton delightedly confessed that her friendship with Miss Chorley had placed her 'quite amongst grandeur and great folks' and, despite candidly admitting that she had been the mistress of a day school in a 'little obscure village', was treated 'with all the genteel familiarity of an equal'.[106] In a seemingly self-deprecating fashion, Weeton suggests that she was, in all probability, 'indebted to the esteem' in which Miss Chorley may have been held for the 'civilities' that she herself had received.[107] Notwithstanding her modesty, however, it would seem that Weeton actually enjoyed receiving what she acknowledged might only have been an appearance of 'genteel familiarity' from her more socially advanced contemporaries, and which was only gained, indirectly, through her association with Miss Chorley: 'Probably I may be indebted to the esteem Miss C. may be held in, for their civility to me; and if I am, it is almost as pleasing to me as if it were chiefly on my own account'.[108]

Despite Miss Chorley being 'so warm a *friend*' of Miss Weeton and affording her the opportunity to socialise with 'grand folk' without being made to

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[105] Weeton, *Journal of a Governess* Vol. I, p. 45; editorial notes, p. 47. Weeton reveals in one of her earliest attempts at a Journal proper, December 3, 1808, which was written during the time of her extended winter visit to the Chorley's that: 'I *have* been under *great* obligations' to Miss Chorley, but it is not clear if these obligations were financial, p. 130. Weeton's emphasis.

[106] Weeton, Letter to Tom Weeton, 22 September, 1808, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, pp. 109-110. Weeton's emphasis.

[107] Weeton, Letter to Tom Weeton, 22 September, 1808, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 110.

[108] Weeton, Letter to Tom Weeton, 22 September, 1808, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 110.

feel inferior (and thus bolster a false sense of social status) the class differences between the two women ultimately became, for Weeton at least, the cause by which this friendship was terminated.[109] Having accepted an invitation to spend the winter of 1808 with Miss Chorley and her parents, Weeton was astonished to discover that she had continually to 'bear the tyranny' of Miss Chorley who 'almost hourly insult[ed]' her like a 'dependent'.[110] Weeton, however, was even more shocked when she found herself provoked into a violent scuffle with her friend. Having refused Chorley's demand to read the contents of her journal, the two women became embroiled in an argument which resulted in Weeton attempting to wrestle her friend from the bedroom. Having lost all composure, Weeton confessed that they both 'struggled' until Weeton eventually realised that she 'too was using force, [and] let her [Chorley] go'.[111] During an apparent attempt at reconciliation on Miss Chorley's part, which took the form of an offer and agreement to share a walk, Weeton was once again subject to her friend's physical aggression: 'She was very silent all the way. […] When she wanted me to cross the street, she pulled or pushed me rudely, without speaking; and not always being aware of her intention, I several times was in danger of stumbling, for she had hold of my arm'.[112] Notably, however, it appears that Weeton's affection for her friend had not been irredeemably damaged by these aggressive outbursts but was ultimately eroded by hurtful reminders of their differing social statuses. Commenting, for example, in her journal entry that recorded her unfortunate outing with Chorley earlier the same day, Weeton declared: 'I could very soon love her again'.[113] Although there were no more aggressive outbursts from Chorley, significantly, Weeton wrote to her brother six days later telling him that she had been made 'miserable for near a month' because, she claimed, Chorley 'hourly makes me feel my inferiority of birth, fortune, and talents, most painfully'.[114] Thus, 'on a plea of ill-health', Weeton left the Chorley residence the following week.[115]

That Chorley continued to value her relationship with Weeton is evidenced by the fact that she continued to write to Weeton. Perhaps not surprisingly, Weeton

[109] Weeton, Letter to Tom Weeton, 22 September, 1808, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 109.
[110] Weeton, Journal entry, 3 December, 1808, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, pp. 131, 130.
[111] Weeton, Journal entry, 4 December, 1808, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 133.
[112] Weeton, Journal entry, 9 December, 1808, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 135.
[113] Weeton, Journal entry, 9 December, 1808, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 135.
[114] Weeton, Letter to Tom Weeton, 15 December, 1808, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 140.
[115] Weeton, Letter to Tom Weeton, 15 December, 1808, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 140.

categorically refused to comply with requests to resume a correspondence, choosing instead to correspond with Miss Chorley's mother. By this time, however, Weeton was acutely aware that her correspondence would almost certainly find its way (legitimately or otherwise) before the prying eyes of Miss Chorley. Consequently, Weeton seems to have taken the opportunity to exploit her former friend's lack of regard for confidentiality to effectively maintain a correspondence by indirect means. Profoundly hurt, Weeton not only implicitly conveys to Miss Chorley the extent of her 'wounded' feelings but also reveals that she harbours a somewhat malicious fantasy about her former friend.[116] 'Whenever Miss C. sees death as near', Weeton wrote to Mrs Chorley:

> she will see the vanities of this life with very different eyes than those with which she now contemplates them – and when the change in her opinion takes place, in whatever state I may then exist, may I be conscious of it! It would give me such delight! *superior* [sic] even to the pain she has frequently inflicted; and she has wounded me to the very soul. She has made me feel *most bitterly* how much it was possible for one human being to afflict the mind of another. - Forgive this, my dear, respected Mrs. Chorley. I will be more cautious in future. Miss C. too, will *some time* forgive it. [117]

Although Weeton and Chorley were women of a mature age (thirty-two and approximately fifty years, respectively), the acrimonious collapse of this relationship would seem to presuppose Ellis's foreboding words of advice about the consequences of 'unequal' friendship between young women in their late teens and early twenties. On closer inspection, however, it would appear that Miss Chorley, at least, sometimes consciously relished the particular seasoning that Weeton's lower social and economic position added to their friendship. Her forceful attempt to invade the privacy of Weeton's journal, for instance, had already been preceded by an earlier, and rather public, breach of confidentiality that suggested Chorley enjoyed the thought of humiliating Weeton. As Weeton carefully noted in her journal entry for October 1808, Chorley, on receipt of a letter from Weeton, had

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[116] Weeton, Letter to Mrs Chorley, 18 January, 1810, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 220.
[117] Weeton, Letter to Mrs Chorley, 18 January, 1810, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 220. Weeton's emphasis.

immediately 'ridiculed […] and shewed it to a large party at dinner'.[118] Surprisingly, Weeton appears not to have been offended by her friend's indiscretion, and even light-heartedly commemorated the act in a rhymed letter she subsequently wrote Chorley. Chorley did however appear to have a genuine affection for Miss Weeton, which the latter acknowledged despite the rupture in their relationship: 'Her [Chorley's] former kindness had made me very partial to her. I cannot soon forget the favours I have received from her, though they serve now to grieve me'.[119]

Yet, it would seem that Weeton's ongoing gratitude represented, for Chorley, an important hierarchical component of their friendship that could be exploited to further dominate and humiliate Weeton. Although never explicitly revealed, it would appear that, prior to her winter residence at the Chorley home, Weeton had at sometime been financially indebted to her friend. Notably, during the volatile period spent with the Chorleys, Weeton's journal evidences the lingering burden of gratitude she is made to feel by Chorley for a debt that has since been discharged: 'I am no dependent, thank God for it! yet she treats me as such […]. I *have* been under *great* obligations to her; but she has no firm principles. […] I have been under great obligations to her, and *I was not* ungrateful'.[120] By inciting Weeton to acknowledge that she had once been 'dependent' upon an act of kindness, and to remember to maintain her gratitude, Chorley effectively transforms Weeton's gratitude into a form of bondage.

Charlotte Brontë: 'the plot of female amity' and the homosocial desire of working women in *Villette.*

Arguably, given the social and historical distance between Weeton, a late-Georgian governess, and the affluent Victorian women whose lifewritings frame Marcus's study of female same-sex bonds, objections might be raised regarding the extent to which Weeton is a relevant paradigm with which to explore the homosocial bonds of middle-class Victorian women. Yet, whilst same-sex female bonding may have become an integral component of mainstream ideals concerning Victorian middle-class femininity as Marcus argues, Weeton's letterbooks and journals nevertheless

[118] Weeton, Journal entry, 8 November, 1808, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 119.
[119] Weeton, Journal entry, 9 December, 1808, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 134.
[120] Weeton, Journal entry, 3 December, 1808, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 130. Weeton's emphasis.

illustrate that close bonds of friendship between women were equally important to some women in this earlier historical period. Indeed, the concerted efforts of Weeton's mother to gain 'a proper companion' for her adolescent daughter by seeking the acquaintance of their more affluent neighbours, the Misses Prescott, would certainly seem to suggest that there existed a significant investment in (re)affirming social status through female friendship amongst some of the middling ranks of society during this period. However, more specifically, Weeton's autobiographical record provides an insight into the complex struggles that some working women from the middle strata of society encountered when trying to establish female bonds. Thus, Weeton's account draws attention to the significance of same-sex female bonding for the Victorian middle-class woman in comparable circumstances. By finding herself somewhat 'peculiarly situated' within society as a result of her family's financial disappointments, Weeton can clearly be equated with the many middle-class Victorian women who were compelled to seek suitably respectable positions of employment after having found, like Brontë and, not least, the heroine of *Villette* Lucy Snowe, that 'self-reliance and exertion were forced upon [them] by circumstances' of financial and social decline.[121] Of particular relevance is the fact that despite the social exclusion or invisibility that Weeton and Brontë resented during the periods they worked as governesses, both nevertheless attempted, with differing levels of success, to establish bonds of friendship with their female employers.[122]

In fact, whilst working as a teacher at Madame Heger's pensionnat in Brussels, Brontë explicitly revealed how, at times, her reliance upon her female employer for companionship was absolute, despite her growing attachment to Constantin, Madame Heger's husband. Brontë was of course not the only female teacher employed in the pensionnat but, with the exception of fellow colleague Mademoiselle Sophie whom she found 'more likeable', Brontë shunned the friendship of all the other (foreign) teachers, preferring instead the company of *both*

[121] Weeton, 'A Retrospect' in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 20; Charlotte Brontë, *Villette* (London: Penguin Books, 1985) p. 95. All further references will be given in the body of the text following the initial 'V'.

[122] Weeton's complaint of being 'shut out' of 'society' whilst employed by the Armitages, for example, clearly foreshadows those of Charlotte Brontë who declared: 'I see now […] that a private governess has no existence […] except as connected with the wearisome duties she has to fulfil', Brontë, Letter to Emily, June 8, 1839, in Smith (ed.), *The Letters*, Vol. I, p. 191.

the Hegers.[123] Although, as Richard Nemesvari suggests, it was Constantin 'who was to have the greatest impact on Brontë', both emotionally and intellectually, Madame Heger nevertheless appears to have been of significant emotional importance to Brontë at various times during the period she spent working at the Heger pensionnat.[124] Two months after she returned to Brussels without her sister, for example, Brontë declared in a letter to Ellen Nussey that Monsieur *and* Madame Heger were 'the only two persons' for whom she had any 'regard and esteem'.[125] Such regard was by no means one-sided, however. As Brontë also explained in her letter, the Hegers had generously invited her to take a share in their family hospitality: 'They told me when I first returned that I was to consider their sitting-room my sitting-room also and to go there whenever I was not engaged in the school-room'.[126] In an earlier letter to Nussey, Brontë also disclosed how she had been 'received […] with great kindness' by Madame Heger when she returned to Brussels.[127] It would also appear, however, that Brontë had previously been the recipient of Madame's benevolent regard during her absence. Whilst Brontë's father received a letter of condolence (from Constantin) relating to the death of the Brontë sisters' aunt Elizabeth (which had precipitated their return to England), Charlotte also received a 'kind and affectionate' letter from Madame.[128] According to Frederika MacDonald, however, by May 1843 Brontë's affection for Madame had finally been eclipsed by her devotion to Constantin.[129] It is certainly true that in the correspondence to her sister at that time Brontë reveals a definite cooling of regard between herself and Madame Heger, and that she lamented only the loss of Constantin's regard. Yet, in correspondence written nearly two months later Brontë indicates that Madame Heger's affection and companionship were still considered as being highly important to her. In fact Brontë confesses her complete emotional

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[123] Smith, 'Introduction', in *The Letters*, Vol. I, p. 13. My emphasis.
[124] Richard Nemesvari, 'Introduction' in Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2004), p. 13.
[125] Brontë, Letter to Ellen Nussey, March 6, 1843, in Smith (ed.), *The Letters*, Vol. I, p. 311.
[126] Brontë, Letter to Ellen Nussey, March 6, 1843, in Smith (ed.), *The Letters*, Vol. I, p. 311.
[127] Brontë, Letter to Ellen Nussey, January 30, 1843, in Smith (ed.), *The Letters*, Vol. I, p. 308.
[128] Brontë, Letter to Ellen Nussey, late June (?), 1843, in Smith (ed.), *The Letters*, Vol. I, p. 325: Constantin's letter of condolence to Patrick Brontë is written on behalf of both himself and Madame Heger ('we').
[129] Frederika Richardson Macdonald, *The Secret of Charlotte Brontë followed by some reminiscences of the real Monsieur and Madame Heger* (London: T.C. & E.C. Jack, 1914), pp. 51, 54. MacDonald was a pupil at Madame Heger's pensionnat fifteen years after Brontë had been a teacher there.

dependence upon her employer, complaining bitterly to Nussey that Madame had effectively abandoned her:

> you will hardly believe it when I tell you that Mde Heger (good & kind as I have described her) never comes near me on these occasions […] I own I was astonished the first time I was left alone thus […] and she knew I was quite by myself and never took the least notice of me – Yet I know she praises me very much and says what excellent lessons I give &c. – She is not colder to me than she is to the other teachers – but they are less *dependant* on her than I am – they have relations & acquaintance in Bruxelles.[130]

Given the earlier suggestions that her employer had already withdrawn the affectionate interest she had previously shown, and the apparent conviction that Madame Heger did not like her, Brontë's subsequent astonishment at being negated is somewhat disingenuous. That Madame Heger did in fact withdraw the regard and sympathy she had earlier shown to Brontë is perhaps not surprising given Brontë's growing affection for her husband. Nevertheless, Brontë's letters evidence that during her stay in Brussels she and Madame Heger established a valued bond of mutual regard that had previously been denied Brontë by her first employer Mrs Sidgwick.

Although, in her study, Marcus briefly notes that in 1865 Marion Bradley, a wife and mother, had candidly expressed her 'love' for her 'gentle, lively, wise, [and] cultivated' governess, the significance that Bradley's affection crossed the boundaries of a professional relationship (and, therefore class) is absent from any discussion in Marcus's study.[131] Similarly, Marcus also briefly mentions the account of Georgiana Sitwell who recalled how one of her family's governesses had 'formed a passionate attachment' to the family's recently acquired French governess.[132] Once again, however, the significance of middle-class female bonding in the workplace is omitted from Marcus's discussion. Yet, as both Weeton's autobiographical accounts and Brontë's letters explicitly reveal, the desire to form close bonds with other women was not exclusive to the affluent and leisured woman of society, but was of

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[130] Brontë, Letter to Ellen Nussey, late June (?), 1843, in Smith (ed.), *The Letters*, Vol. I, p. 325.
[131] Marian Bradley, British Library, Mss. EG. 3766 A, p. 27; quoted in Marcus, *Between Women*, p. 58.
[132] Osbert Sitwell, *Two Generations* (London: Macmillan, 1940), p. 28; quoted in Marcus, *Between Women*, p. 56.

equal importance to working women from the middle strata of society. Moreover, Weeton and Brontë's lifewriting also demonstrates how such women came to regard the workplace as the only means available to form direct, intimate bonds with other women. That Weeton, in particular, persisted in her attempts to establish and/or maintain relationships that proved on occasions to be rather problematic not only highlights the difficulties encountered in circumstances where a desire for female friendship necessarily had to be negotiated from an inferior or 'incongruent' social position, but also implicitly reveals a sustained commitment to and need for female same-sex friendships that extended beyond the contexts of domesticity and matrimony explored in Marcus's study. Weeton's account, therefore, provides an additional and valuable perspective from which to consider, in general, the same-sex bonds of working middle-class Victorian women like Brontë and, in particular, those represented in her semi-autobiographical novel *Villette*.[133]

Given the parameters of Marcus's overarching argument that the Victorians held a committed belief in the importance of an interdependent relationship between female amity and (heterosexual) marriage, it is perhaps understandable that she overlooks the significance of Marion Bradley's affection for her governess, and the 'passionate attachment' the Sitwells' governess formed with another fellow governess. Moreover, it is perhaps equally understandable that Marcus subsequently fails to consider the importance of Lucy Snowe's close bonds with her two female employers: Madame Beck and Miss Marchmont. For example, whilst Marcus highlights as significant Lucy's explicit confession that it was somewhat unusual for her to declare that she 'liked' Paulina, this 'rare' or infrequent declaration was by no

[133] In her biography of Charlotte Brontë, Lyndall Gordon specifically draws upon what she calls Brontë's 'autobiographical fictions' to contest the 'usual perspective' of Charlotte Brontë' as 'a figure of pathos', Lyndall Gordon, *Charlotte Brontë: A Passionate Life* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994), pp. 4, 3. Whilst it is not the intention of this discussion to suggest that *Villette* was merely an oblique autobiographical account of Brontë's experiences as a student-teacher at the Pensionnat Heger the biographical details alluded to in the novel are too significant to be disregarded. Gilbert and Gubar, for instance, have suggested that *Villette* was effectively the final instalment of Brontë's 'fictional attempts to come to terms with her own loveless existence, and specifically with her sorrow at the loss of M. Heger's friendship', Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, second edition (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 400. Moreover, despite Tony Tanner's claim that *Villette* 'is not to be seen as veiled autobiography' and his endeavour to 'consider the novel from a more general perspective – as a study in how a human being attempts to constitute herself in a society largely indifferent to her needs', he nevertheless concedes that '*Villette* follows aspects of Charlotte Brontë's life more closely than any other of her novels', Tony Tanner, 'Introduction' in Brontë, *Villette*, pp. 50, 10. In fact, Tanner's reading is by no means adverse to an occasional recourse to biographical detail and context.

means unique (V, p. 461, BW, p. 105). Lucy had also earlier declared that she 'liked [M]adame' Beck, despite her lack of principles (V, pp. 461, 186). Marcus's suggestion, however, that *Villette* is a notable 'exception' amongst Victorian novels because it fails to replicate an otherwise ubiquitous endorsement of the interdependence of female amity and marriage is nevertheless a rather surprising claim (BW, p. 102). By means of a theoretical concept which she defines as 'the plot of female amity', Marcus argues that female friendship had a 'pivotal role' in the marriage plots of Victorian fiction. 'Victorian novels', she claims, 'make female friendships the catalyst of the marriage plot' (BW, p. 79). Reflecting a cultural investment in the mutually affirming nature of female amity and marriage, fictional representations of female friendships are shown to be neither 'dispensable' nor 'passive' because, according to Marcus, they had the 'generative power and dynamism to launch, direct, and resolve' the novel's marriage plot (BW, p. 79). One female friend, Marcus claims, expresses her love for another in a variety of ways, each of which promotes her friend's marriage. Demonstrations of 'the plot of female amity' include 'mediating a suitor's courtship', bestowing a husband on a friend (or vice versa), and 'helping to remove an obstacle to the friend's marriage' (BW, p. 82).

One of the numerous and more notable examples that Marcus provides to justify her claims is the 'passionate moment' of 'affinity' between Rosamond Lydgate and Dorothea Casaubon in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (BW, pp. 76, 78). Yet, in comparison to Brontë's final novel, in which Marcus claims Brontë substitutes the 'self-sustaining economy of female amity' with a 'vision of the marriage market as a corrosive force that turns friendly gestures into blistering attacks', her reading of female friendship in Eliot's novel is open to question (BW, p. 106). In particular, Marcus illustrates how Dorothea's attempts to 'save' the potentially adulterous Rosamond bring about a reciprocal gesture of momentary amity between these two women.[134] As Marcus correctly suggests, without Rosamond's 'affectionate impulse' toward her love 'rival', 'Dorothea and Will would never make their [own] pivotal romantic admission' (BW, pp. 79, 77, 76). The extent to which this encounter is wholly representative of Victorian cultural ideals of female amity and femininity is open to question, however. Whilst Dorothea

[134] George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 848.

and Rosamond's moment of affinity is perhaps, as Marcus argues, 'the only force powerful enough to tie up the marriage plot's loose ends', it can hardly be considered to exemplify fully Sarah Ellis's claim that bonds of friendship between women were consolidated by an empathy of feminine suffering or by a 'mutual knowledge of each other's capability of receiving pain'.[135] Indeed, the final encounter between Rosamond and Dorothea concludes, for Rosamond at least, with 'a faint taste of jealousy'.[136] Nor, for that matter, can this 'moment of amity' fully support Marcus's claim that it provided 'a model for how [the] men and women […] of Middlemarch [could] resolve their differences' (BW, p. 86). Tess Cosslett, for instance, like Marcus, has highlighted the significance of this episode, suggesting that Eliot's novel depicts 'one of the most intense and emotional scenes of female friendship in Victorian literature'.[137] In fact, Cosslett argues that 'no other relationship, not even that of Will, offers [Dorothea] the sort of emotionalism, intensity and physical closeness of her last meeting with Rosamond'.[138] Importantly, however, Cosslett also notes that whilst ultimately Rosamond may have gratefully remembered Dorothea's 'generosity', she nevertheless subsequently 'reverts to type'.[139] Her reciprocated gesture of sympathy towards Dorothea in which she reveals the true nature of Will's feelings, for example, is not without a defensive element of indignation. That is to say, her 'confession' was not solely a response to the 'subduing influence' of Dorothea, but also arose from a growing desire to refute Will's previous 'reproaches' which, as Eliot's narrator explains, 'were still like a knife-wound within her'.[140] Thus, as Cosslett has argued, Dorothea's intervention only brings about a 'brief' transformation of Rosamond's 'narrowness' and, therefore, the merit of Rosamond's impulsive action is 'severely undercut' by her selfish endeavour to avoid further recriminations from Will.[141]

The limitation of Dorothea's benign feminine influence over Rosamond, however, is further evidenced in the novel's concluding chapter. That is, despite

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[135] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 855; Marcus, p. 79; Ellis, *The Women of England*, p. 224. Although this claim is made with direct reference to sisters, it is, nevertheless, grounded in Ellis's overall argument that bonds between women were established 'for the very reason' that 'their sex [was] formed to suffer', p. 224.
[136] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 857.
[137] Tess Cosslett, *Woman To Woman*, p. 89.
[138] Cosslett, *Woman To Woman*, p. 94.
[139] Cosslett, *Woman To Woman*, p. 102.
[140] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 856.
[141] Cosslett, *Woman To Woman*, p. 101.

earnest attempts to awaken in Rosamond greater feelings of sympathy toward the maligned Tertius, and therefore engender a sense of companionship within the Lydgate marriage, Dorothea's efforts are ultimately shown to be futile. Indeed, Dorothea's reassuring promise to the 'unhappy' Rosamond that 'better days will come' when her husband is 'rightly valued' only testifies to what Eliot's narrator defines as Dorothea's 'usual tendency to over-estimate the good in others'.[142] Ultimately, far from being a portrait of companionship, the Lydgate marriage is depicted as a rather antagonistic relationship wherein Rosamond is subjected to her husband's 'bitter' recriminations for stifling his intellectual and professional ambitions in the interests of furthering her own social aspirations.[143] Although, as Eliot's narrator explains, Rosamond responded with equanimity to her husband's reproaches, and was 'never' again to commit 'a second compromising indiscretion', she nevertheless remained as intractable and divisive as ever. Rosamond, Eliot's narrator explains, 'simply continued to be mild in her temper, inflexible in her judgement, disposed to admonish her husband, and able to frustrate him by stratagem'.[144]

Dorothea's intervening 'rescue', however, does not pass without one notable aspect of lasting influence upon Rosamond and her marriage. Ironically, rather than facilitating a 'harmony' within the Lydgate marriage, which, as Marcus suggests, was a significant function of female friendship, the legacy of these two women's moment of mutual 'sorrow' only serves to undermine further the ideals of companionate marriage Dorothea sought to promote. In fact, during their final encounter together Dorothea unwittingly provides Rosamond with the ultimate rhetorical 'stratagem' for confounding her husband by implicitly revealing to Rosamond the extent to which Tertius shared a stronger affinity with herself than he did with his wife.[145] As she innocently explained to the silenced Rosamond, Tertius felt able to confide in her because they both shared and recognized in each other a common understanding and experience of the emotional constraints and obligations of marriage. For Tertius, marriage was a 'bond' that 'affect[ed] his choice about everything' and, because he knew that Dorothea had experienced a similar form of

[142] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 857.
[143] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 893.
[144] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 893.
[145] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 893.

circumscription in her own marriage, he felt able to make such a confession.[146] Tertius 'could say that to me', Dorothea tells Rosamond, 'because he knows that I had much trial in my marriage […] that I have felt how hard it is to walk always in fear of hurting another who is tied to us'.[147] Effectively, framed within a moment of mutual feminine sorrow, Dorothea discloses to Rosamond an additional affinity of mutual suffering between herself and Tertius. Thus, Dorothea reveals that for both herself and Tertius marriage had effectively become a form of emotional bondage. Informed (or perhaps armed), therefore, with both the knowledge of her husband's empathy with and high esteem for Dorothea, and the burden of obligation he felt for her own happiness, Rosamond is able to conclusively thwart his reproaches. In particular, when confronted with Tertius's accusations that she had literally 'murdered' his intellectual ambitions, Rosamond's 'placid' retort was to rhetorically suggest to her husband that it was 'a pity' his wife was not Dorothea, a woman 'whom he was always praising and placing above her'.[148] So effective is Rosamond's 'strong answer' at silencing her husband's criticisms that their conversation, as Eliot's narrator notes, 'ended with the advantage on Rosamond's side'.[149] The impact, therefore, of Dorothea's attempt to 'rescue' Rosamond and, as such, the resulting moment of affinity these two women share, is somewhat ambivalent. Although Dorothea succeeds in preventing Rosamond from pursuing any further 'compromising indiscretion[s]' she also, unwittingly, provides (and becomes) the means by which Rosamond can triumph in what is ultimately delineated as a marital war of attrition.[150]

Whilst arguably Marcus's reading of Dorothea and Rosamond's 'passionate moment' of amity overestimates the extent to which it can be regarded as fully concurring with the inter-related cultural ideals of female friendship and companionate marriage, surprisingly, a similar gesture between Lucy Snowe and Paulina Home, in Brontë's *Villette,* is regarded by Marcus as exemplifying 'the novel's rejection of the plot of female amity' (BW, p. 106). Whilst Marcus considers Dorothea and Rosamond's moment of 'communion' as demonstrating the central importance of this plot in the Victorian novel, Brontë's final novel, she claims, is 'an

[146] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 855.
[147] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 855.
[148] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 893.
[149] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 893.
[150] Eliot, *Middlemarch*, p. 893.

exception that proves the rule' (BW, p. 3). Accordingly, Marcus considers Brontë's fictional heroine Lucy Snowe to be somewhat unique in her 'anomalous' aversion to all manner of female friendships (BW, p. 102). Despite opportunities to develop intimate social bonds with a spectrum of women, ranging from the 'coquettish Ginevra Fanshawe, [and] exemplary Paulina Home, [to the] commanding Madame Beck, […] Lucy […] spurn[s] female friendship in all [its] forms' (BW, p. 103). Caught up with other women in the ever present competition and rivalry for men, Brontë's heroine, Marcus suggests, 'refuses' female friendship because these other women effectively hold up a mirror to Lucy (literally in the case of Ginevra) which undermines her femininity (BW, p. 104). Thus, the relish of Ginevra in seeking to demonstrate to Lucy the stark contrast between them 'undoes [Lucy's] sense of her own femininity instead of bolstering it' (BW, p. 104). Even when Lucy allows herself to participate in the economy of heterosexual exchange with the 'exemplary' Paulina, the currency of this friendship, Marcus claims, 'creates a sense of deficiency in Lucy that risks turning friendship into rivalry' (BW, p. 105). Paulina, Marcus suggests, 'becomes a galling reminder of her unwitting victory over Lucy' which results in Lucy's refusal to 'mediate her [Paulina's] courtship' with John Bretton (BW, p. 106). Thus, replacing reciprocity and altruism with a prevalence of rivalry between women to compete for, rather than bestow men upon one another, the inevitable outcome, Marcus argues, is a failure to 'generate marriage' which consequently results also in a failure to consolidate female friendships (BW, p. 104 and p. 106).

Notably, however, Marcus's reading overlooks the significance of Lucy's influential involvements in facilitating Paulina Home's marriage to Dr John Bretton.[151] Although Marcus is correct in arguing that Lucy later refuses to 'share' in 'the couple's love', Brontë's heroine does, however, endeavour to remove, at what appears to be great emotional cost to herself, the principal impediment to Paulina and Dr John's future marriage: namely Paulina and her father's reluctance to openly acknowledge to one another that Paulina was no longer a 'little girl' (BW, p. 106, V, pp. 520, 523). Unlike Ginevra, for whom femininity presented the means by which she could defer adulthood in order to continue to 'enjoy youth', and thereby

[151] Gilbert and Gubar have also noted that whilst escaping Madame Beck's pensionnat to covertly attend the nocturnal festival, Lucy Snowe inadvertently effects Ginevra Fanshawe and de Hamal's elopement and subsequent marriage, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, pp. 435-436.

perpetuate her own hedonism, Paulina's arrested development, as Lucy observes, is testimony to a self-negating devotion to her father, de Bassompierre (V, p. 156). Lucy notes, for instance, that in her father's presence Paulina 'really was still a child', yet, in his absence, de Bassompierre's 'daughterling' was not like the other 'women and girls' to whom Lucy had become 'accustomed' (V, pp. 384, 373). In fact, Lucy observes that Paulina not only 'promised' but proved herself to be an 'exception' amongst these other women (V, p. 373). With Lucy 'she was serious, and as womanly as thought and feeling could make her' (V, p. 384). The combination, however, of both de Bassompierre's disinclination to acknowledge Paulina's adult status, and Paulina's reluctance to inflict the 'pain' which would 'wake papa from his dream' by telling him she is 'no more a little girl' were not just impediments to Paulina's maturity, but also obstacles to Dr John and Paulina's own desire to disclose their relationship (V, p. 467). In a gesture that certainly bears some of the hallmarks of Marcus's definition of the 'plot of female amity', Lucy intervenes to overcome this dilemma and 'speaks out for the lovers' to Paulina's father.[152] Lucy, however, not only emphasises to de Bassompierre that his daughter was now 'grown up' by 'repeat[ing]' her age but also brings to his attention the issue of Paulina and Dr John's courtship: 'And – sir – she – *they* have long wanted to consult you' (V, p. 522). Lucy's hyphenated comment is notable because it highlights the emotional struggle she overcomes on behalf of Paulina and Dr John, and emphasizes, in its faltering, broken emergence, the 'heartbreak' she had felt over her own unrequited love for John Bretton, something to which she had alluded to in her previous conversation with Paulina (V, p. 520). Only after this intervention, which instigates Paulina's own confession and the Count's eventual acceptance of the couple's engagement, is the ultimate obstacle to Paulina and Dr John's marriage removed.

This, however, is not the only evidence of Lucy's active commitment to a feminine altruism that facilitates marriage, which, as Marcus suggests, was of central importance to Victorian female friendship. In an earlier scene, for instance, having once again taken the opportunity to confide in Lucy, Paulina reveals that Ginevra's conceited claim to have enslaved the affections of Dr John had made her 'doubtful of his character' (V, p. 391). Noting that Paulina had recently become

[152] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p.434.

'reserved in her manner towards' Dr John, Lucy senses that Ginevra's act of 'jealousy' threatens to undermine the 'promise' of the couple's future together and, as such, orchestrates an opportunity to disprove 'the power' of Ginevra's 'boast' (V, pp. 391, 467, 392). The timing of Lucy's intervention, however, is notably poignant because it coincides with her recent burial of Dr John's letters and, consequently, a burial of any future hope of securing his love. Yet, despite the 'grief' she felt over her own unrequited love, Lucy acts to assuage Paulina's anxiety and thereby ensure the continuation of the young Countess's growing attraction toward him (V, p. 380). In fact, Lucy later reveals to Paulina that she had noted from the 'first day she had seen [them] together' she had been determined that they 'must be united' (V, p. 467).

The 'pivotal role' that she undoubtedly undertakes to facilitate her friend's marriage to John Bretton is not, however, the only testimony of Lucy's commitment to the Victorian ideals of female friendship that Marcus overlooks. Also omitted from any discussion in her study are two of the most (if not *the* most) intimate relationships that Lucy establishes with other women and, significantly, in whose employment she necessarily finds herself engaged. Marcus, for instance, makes no mention of Lucy's fondness for the aged spinster Miss Marchmont, who employed Lucy as a paid companion. Yet, not unlike the aforementioned Miss Weeton, the fictional Lucy not only gains economic security from this professional relationship with her female employer but also finds relief from acutely felt emotional deprivation. Although only offering a little morsel of affection Miss Marchmont, Lucy declares, was a woman to whom she 'clung' and whose 'affection' she nevertheless 'prized as if it were a solid pearl' (V, p. 97). Lucy's devotion, as her comments imply, was not merely one-sided or just another form of 'idolatry' on the part of a female employee for her mistress, however. Indeed, Lucy's 'dear' mistress consolidates her fondness for her employee by bequeathing to her the unusually high sum of one hundred pounds (V, p. 593). In comparison with contemporary estimations Miss Marchmont's gift to Lucy would equate to almost three times as much as that of the annual salary of some domestic governesses. Whilst noting that some women were employed for a salary of as little as twelve pounds, for instance, Lady Eastlake's anecdotal calculations ultimately concluded that the average salary

of a governess in 1844 was approximately thirty-five pounds. [153] This estimation, however, was far from being universally representative or fixed. By the mid-nineteenth-century opportunities for appropriately 'genteel' middle-class female employment, such as private teaching, were decreasing. Consequently increased competition for suitably respectable middle-class female employment 'drove salaries down'.[154] As a general indication of the marked decline in the level of salaries that could be commanded by a governess one might compare the bold (and successful) request of thirty guineas made by Miss Weeton in 1809 with that of the twenty pounds (less four pounds for laundry expenses) Charlotte Brontë was to earn during a second period of working as a governess thirty-two years later.[155]

An indication of the extent of Lucy's own lasting regard for her employer, and further evidence of the level of her participation in the cultural practices of mainstream Victorian female homosociality, is demonstrated by the fact that Lucy carried in her few belongings 'a small plaited lock of Miss Marchmont's grey hair' (V, p. 130). Notably, as both Marcus and Patrizia Di Bello have argued, synonymous with the 'giver's body', the gift of a lock of hair was an important and valued token of affection for the Victorians (BW, p. 4).[156] Indeed, a 'much dissapointed [sic]' Charlotte Brontë was prepared to pay 'double [the] postage' costs to 'obtain' a lock of Ellen Nussey's hair, but was ultimately compelled to plead poverty.[157] Although it is unclear if Miss Marchmont gave Lucy the lock of her hair or that Lucy took it post mortem, what is certain is that in honouring such a keepsake between the pages of her 'memorandum-book' Lucy's actions nevertheless underscore the level of emotional attachment she had both developed and maintained for her employer (V. p. 129).

Whilst Marcus is correct in suggesting that Lucy 'succumbs' to the coquettish and 'physical charms' of Ginevra, and liked to pique the 'feather brained school-girl', it is Lucy's relationship with Miss Marchmont that signals her particular preference for forming close bonds with women older than herself, whose

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[153] Lady Eastlake, quoted in Trev Broughton and Ruth Symes, *The Governess: An Anthology* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997), pp. 110-112**.** See also W.F. Neef, *Victorian Working Women: An Historical and Literary Study of Women in British Industries and Professions 1832-1850* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1966), p. 158.
[154] Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, p. 127.
[155] Weeton, Letter to Tom Weeton, 9 December, 1809, in *Journal of a Governess*, Vol. I, p. 202.
[156] Patrizia Di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England: Ladies, Mothers and Flirts* (Aldershot : Ashgate, 2007).
[157] Brontë, Letter to Ellen Nussey, 21 July, 1832, in Smith (ed.), *The Letters*, Vol. I, p. 115.

femininity offered models that notably contrasted to the juvenile or infantile doll-like forms embodied by Ginevra and Polly respectively (BW, p. 103, V, p. 295). Although her relationship with the mature and 'handsome' Mrs Bretton, for example, was somewhat understated and tranquil, Lucy nevertheless enjoyed, prior to Polly's arrival, being the only one who 'was a good deal taken notice' of by her godmother (V, p. 61). It is, however, her second employer Madame Beck (another older woman), who distinctly represents a model of active, efficient and independent femininity, with whom Lucy forms her most intense bond. Like Brontë's vacillating regard for Madame Heger, Lucy displays ambivalence about her 'secret, crafty, [and] passionless' employer, but nevertheless reveals a strong admiration for the shrewd, business-minded Madame Beck, as is emphasised in her lengthy eulogy:

> I say again, madame was a very great and a very capable woman. That school offered for her powers too limited a sphere; she ought to have swayed a nation: she should have been the leader of a turbulent legislative assembly. Nobody could have brow-beaten her, none irritated her nerves, exhausted her patience, over-reached her astuteness. In her own single person, she could have comprised the duties of a first minister and a superintendent of police (V, p. 137).

Ostensibly, it might be argued that the high regard Lucy exhibits for her employer serves to demonstrate the restraints that were imposed upon gifted and able women by conventional ideals of middle-class femininity.[158] However, Lucy's assessment of Madame Beck nevertheless also draws attention to the fact that her seldom voiced admiration for another woman arises in the working environment, beyond the domestic matrix of marriage and family that informs Marcus's reading of Victorian female homosocial desire. Thus, to read Brontë's depictions of female same-sex bonds in *Villette*, as Marcus has, framed exclusively within an understanding of their relationship to the heterosexual economy, fails to acknowledge the full context in which some of those bonds are formed. Marcus briefly observes, for example, that Lucy rejects the 'overtures of special intimacy' made to her by each of the fellow

[158] Jane Eyre, the eponymous heroine of Brontë's earlier novel, was even more explicit in her complaint that middle-class women 'suffer[ed] from too rigid restraint'. Madame Beck, of course, does not have to 'confine [herself] to the making of puddings and knitting of stockings', but Lucy is highlighting here that even those careers available to intelligent and ambitious women did not always provide the means for their talents and aspirations to be fully realised. *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*, ed. Richard Nemesvari (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2004), p. 178.

teachers at Madame Beck's school (V, p. 194). Yet Marcus regards this antipathy as a further manifestation of Lucy's universal 'distaste for other women's amity' (BW, p. 102).

Marcus's interpretation however overlooks the professional rivalry that partly structures Lucy's relationships with these women; and in particular Lucy's antagonistic relationship with 'the senior mistress' Zélie St Pierre, an incompetent teacher, whom Lucy complained 'mortally hated work' (V, p. 195). Lucy's hostile responses to St Pierre suggest that her personal (and possibly racially motivated) dislike for the Parisienne teacher is at least exacerbated, if not informed, by her resentment of an unjustifiable difference in their rank (V, p. 415). As Lucy realises, however, their respective positions are, of course, determined by their employer. Thus, on one occasion, Brontë's heroine seemingly takes the opportunity to exploit a conversation with Madame Beck to undermine her immediate superior. During this conversation Lucy 'asked' her employer 'why she kept [St Pierre] in the establishment', despite being fully cognisant of her failings (V, p. 195). In addition to perhaps further aggravating Madame Beck's 'antipathy' toward St Pierre, Lucy's question also compels her employer to justify her confidence in a teacher who, by her own admission, 'was of little use as far as communication of knowledge went' (V, p. 195).

To establish a more accurate understanding of Lucy's complex relationships with some of these women in the novel, and more specifically her ambivalent relationship with Madame Beck, is therefore dependent upon acknowledging the particular characteristics of the environment in which Brontë situates her heroine. Principally this is to recognize that the domestic realm in which middle-class female intimacy was conventionally constituted has been decentred in Brontë's novel. Yet it is equally important to keep in mind the fact (without overdetermining its autobiographical significance) that Brontë decided to echo her own earlier experience of becoming a teacher in Madame Heger's pensionnat by portraying her heroine as similarly employed in a relatively large Catholic continental boarding school for girls. An awareness of the context into which Brontë chooses to locate her heroine, which is discussed in the following section, allows for a more discerning reading of Brontë's ambivalent portrait of female intimacy than that offered by

Marcus, and one that takes into consideration how Brontë's depiction of same-sex female bonding engages with issues of feminine authority, hierarchy, and ambition.

Brontë's own experience of teaching in a girls' school had, of course, been gained at both Roe Head in Yorkshire, where she had previously been a pupil, and Brussels where she had initially gone to extend her own education in order to improve her prospects of opening a school in Haworth with her sisters Emily and Anne. However, as Christina de Bellaigue demonstrates in her comparative analysis of early nineteenth-century boarding schools for girls in England and France, the experience of school life for both teachers and pupils in continental schools, which were predicated on an earlier system of Catholic convent education, was considerably different to that in England. Whilst de Bellaigue's study illustrates that both English and French establishments were enabling sites of culturally sanctioned feminine empowerment for schoolmistresses, the two distinct models of female education on which these schools were founded are shown by de Bellaigue to have had a significantly different impact upon the expression of both female authority and intimacy. According to de Bellaigue, for instance, English boarding schools in the first half of the nineteenth century were predominantly small, intimate establishments run by women who actively promoted the familial character of their schools (some of which were in fact the schoolmistress's own home) and who developed warm relationships with their charges. The assimilation of education within the family sphere, de Bellaigue notes, was chiefly a consequence of a dominant middle-class conception of domestic feminine agency. Regarded as 'an extension of the maternal role', de Bellaigue argues, teaching was an occupation that could be legitimately undertaken by middle-class women without detrimentally impacting upon their social status.[159] In fact, according to de Bellaigue, the association with motherhood proved to be a particularly effective means for many schoolmistresses to navigate the cultural constraints placed on non-heteronormative feminine autonomy. In an era when unmarried and childless women were being labelled as 'redundant', 'incomplete', and 'unnatural' by authors such as W. R. Greg, the majority of schoolmistresses, who were themselves unmarried and childless, de Bellaigue suggests, were able to 'reconcile their situation with

[159] Christina de Bellaigue, 'Behind the School Walls: The School Community in French and English Boarding Schools for Girls, 1810 – 1867' in *Paedagogica Historica*, Vol. 40, No.s 1 – 2, August 2006, pp. 107-121, p. 112.

prevailing ideals of femininity'.[160] Moreover, the association with the maternal figure also proved to be a valuable means by which these women could articulate feminine authority. Hence, in addition to characterising their educational establishment as a family home, schoolmistresses would actively cultivate a shared belief between themselves and their pupils that their relationship was structured in terms of 'adoptive motherhood'.[161] As de Bellaigue notes, however, although this almost exclusive correlation with the maternal figure situated within a domestic sphere facilitated a viable expression of feminine empowerment for these women, it also implicitly evidences the cultural limitations of middle-class female authority in England. The endeavour to approximate their schools with the family home and to define their role in terms of a benign maternal sovereignty, de Bellaigue argues, ultimately 'confined' English schoolmistresses 'within the straitjackets of conventional notions of feminine domesticity and dependence'.[162]

Conversely, however, de Bellaigue study demonstrates that as result of the different model of female education that was in place in France, schoolmistresses were able to 'develop a more authoritative and public persona'.[163] Whilst English boarding schools for girls had emerged from and consolidated a practice of home education, those across the channel, she argues, were defined by and organised in line with the traditional system of Catholic convent schooling. Rigidly hierarchized, these pensions were comparatively much larger institutions than those operating in England during the same period, and housed a greater number of pupils and teachers in buildings that were specifically adapted to eschew domestic conviviality. As de Bellaigue notes, however, the disassociation with a domestically characterized model of education (and by implication conventional maternal femininity) was also compounded by the schoolmistresses themselves. Unlike their counterparts in England, the women who presided over these institutions tended to understate the affiliation between motherhood and education. One schoolmistress, for instance, is quoted in de Bellaigue's article as likening her role to that of 'a monarch at the heart of her court', and the prominent educationalist and schoolmistress Madame Campan, Bellaigue notes, considered herself as being at 'the head of a little scholastic

[160] de Bellaigue, 'Behind the School Walls', p. 116.
[161] de Bellaigue, 'Behind the School Walls', p. 116.
[162] de Bellaigue, 'Behind the School Walls', p. 121.
[163] de Bellaigue, 'Behind the School Walls', p. 121.

government'.[164] However, although Bellaigue's study identifies the development of French boarding schools as being specifically indebted to the model of convent education, and thereby investing French schoolmistresses in particular with an expansive level of authority, accounts offered by Brontë of Madame Heger's Catholic pensionnat evidence that this establishment was also founded upon a similar model of education which afforded its directress a comparable authority. In fact on first entering the Heger pensionatt as a pupil, which she explicitly referred to as 'a French school', Brontë seemed rather impressed by the scale of Madame Heger's responsibilities.[165] In a letter to Ellen Nussey she described Madame Heger as presiding over a 'large school' with 'about 40 externes or day-pupils and 12 pensionnaires or boarders' and as being responsible for the administration of three (resident) teachers and 'no less than seven [visiting] masters'.[166] Brontë's initial estimate of the attendant pupil population was almost doubled to 'nearly ninety', however, when she revealed to Nussey two months later that Madame Heger had 'offer[ed] to dismiss her English master and take me as English teacher'.[167] The extent of administrative governance that continental girls' boarding schools made available to women like Madame Heger is clearly considered further, however, in Brontë's fictional portrait of Madame Beck's pensionatt and Madame Beck's role therein:

> The establishment was both a pensionatt and an externat: the externes or day-pupils exceeded one hundred in number; the boarders were about a score. Madame must have possessed high administrative powers: she ruled all these, together with four teachers, eight masters, six servants, and three children, managing at the same time to perfection the pupils' parents and friends (V, p. 135).

As becomes apparent in de Bellaigue's comparative analysis, as well as Brontë's correspondence and fiction, the 'conventual' system of education for middle-class girls could place these schoolmistresses in 'powerful positions' which offered them a much broader scope for the articulation of feminine authority than was available to those women who superintended 'domestic' English girls' boarding schools.

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[164] Jeanne Campan, *De'l Education*, Volume II, p. 25, quoted in de Bellaigue, 'Behind the School Walls', p. 118.
[165] Brontë, Letter to Ellen Nussey, May 1842, in Smith (ed.), *The Letters*, Vol. I, p. 285.
[166] Brontë, Letter to Ellen Nussey, May 1842, in Smith (ed.), *The Letters*, Vol. I, p. 284.
[167] Brontë, Letter to Ellen Nussey, [?] July 1842, Smith (ed.), *Selected Letters*, p. 37.

Notably, however, de Bellaigue's study also evidences that that one of the fundamental ways in which this feminine authority was frequently enacted and reinforced throughout these schools was by restricting or managing female intimacy. In part, according to de Bellaigue, this was the result of 'a deep-seated suspicion of girls' autonomy' and an underlying preoccupation with the 'preservation of [their] innocence'.[168] Thus, in addition to being closely supervised, schoolgirls were also subject to measures that prohibited them, without prior authorization, from participating in activities involving less than three. Yet the regulation and restriction upon female homosociality was also an integral part of defining and maintaining distinctions within the overall hierarchy of schools. de Bellaigue's study, for instance, reveals that the teachers at Madame Bazin's boarding school in the 1840s were explicitly instructed to remain aloof from the older pupils, and 'to observe a certain reserve that would ensure and preserve their authority'.[169] de Bellaigue's study also draws attention, however, to the fact that the hierarchical relationships of school employees were governed by the same principle of inhibited female homosociality. The aforementioned Madame Campan, for example, is noted by de Bellaigue as having advised other women who were similarly charged with the overall responsibility for supervising a girls' boarding school to 'avoid letting subordinates become too familiar'.[170] In some instances this distinction of sovereignty was symbolised by physical separation. Another schoolmistress discussed in de Bellaigue's article, for example, remained stationed in a house that was divorced from the school premises and delegated the daily management of the school, de Bellaigue claims, to her 'overworked deputy'.[171] On occasions, however, an inflexible insistence upon detached authority appears to have resulted in widespread resentment and anxiety. One former pupil of a school 'in which pupils and teachers were divided up into a strict hierarchy' recalled that its directress was

[168] de Bellaigue, 'Behind the School Walls', p. 120.
[169] A. D. Seine, Règlement de Mme Bazin (c. 1842), quoted in de Bellaigue, 'Behind the School Walls', p. 118.
[170] Campan, *De'l Education*, Volume II, p. 25, quoted in de Bellaigue, 'Behind the School Walls', p. 118.
[171] de Bellaigue, 'Behind the School Walls', p. 118.

unanimously regarded as a 'perfect despot' whom 'everyone in the house, without exception, feared'.[172]

That hierarchy and women's leadership in the workplace have proved to be impediments to *modern* female intimacy has been clearly evidenced in Susie Orbach and Luise Eichenbaum's (Feminist) psychoanalytical study *Between Women*. It would, of course, be misleading to simply claim that the experiences of late-twentieth-century women directly correlate with those of nineteen-century middle-class working women, either real or as fictionally represented by Brontë. Yet the particular characteristics of the continental school, as outlined above, can be seen to some extent to presuppose the modern working environment in which, as Orbach and Eichenbaum argue, women's increased presence significantly problematized their relationships with one another. In part, Orbach and Eichenbaum attribute this to the 'history' of the working environment, which they suggest was traditionally associated with a particularly masculine ethos of rivalry, and completely devoid of empathy or compassion.[173] Being informed by a masculine culture of competition and ambition, and therefore anxious to retain a 'place on the ladder to promotion', they suggest, incited a philosophy of 'every-woman-for-herself' which resulted in the 'bonds between women [being] broken'.[174] However, compounding female hostility in the workplace, they argue, was the increased opportunities for women to actually succeed in ascending the career ladder and to take up positions of seniority over other women. This, they claim, generated 'a new kind of relationship for women' that was 'not always easy to negotiate'.[175] Whilst the appearance of female superiors during this period provided important and inspirational models of feminine empowerment, these figures, they contend, were also the unwitting catalysts for extensive female enmity within the workplace. Ambitious female colleagues, for instance, eager to 'emulate or surpass' the achievements of their female superiors became rivals in a struggle for the 'approval' and recognition of other women.[176] Orbach and Eichenbaum also highlight, however, the problematic homosocial

[172] de Bellaigue, 'Behind the School Walls', p. 118; Mme Brada (Henrietta Puliga), *Souvenirs d'une Petite du Second Empire* (Paris, 1921), p. 29, quoted in de Bellaigue, p. 118.
[173] Susie Orbach and Luise Eichenbaum, *Between Women: Love, Envy and Competition in Women's Friendships* (London: Arrow Books, 1994), p. 28.
[174] Orbach and Eichenbaum, *Between Women*, p. 28.
[175] Orbach and Eichenbaum, *Between Women*, p. 29.
[176] Orbach and Eichenbaum, *Between Women*, p. 29.

relationships of those women who occupied positions of authority. These women, they argue, could themselves become the recipients of a gamut of emotional responses from other women. A woman's newly established status of power and influence, for instance, could inspire emulation or 'admiration' but also provoke 'feelings of jealousy' and 'of anger', and her success viewed as a measure of invulnerability which rendered her implicitly masculine, thus isolating her further from her fellow female colleagues.[177] 'Other women', Orbach and Eichenbaum suggest, 'cease[d] responding to her woman to woman […]. It [was] as if, in being in a position of authority, of power at work, she [was] no longer a woman'.[178] It is clearly evident, of course, that Orbach and Eichenbaum's analysis is framed within a historical context of post-1970s, second-wave (essentialist) woman-centred feminist beliefs that would not have informed the much earlier same-sex working relationships of mid-Victorian women. The implicit loss of femininity, for instance, associated with powerful female figures is effectively regarded by these critics as something to be lamented. As has been noted, however, for some of the empowered directresses of nineteenth-century continental girls' schools, nonconformity to femininity was something to be celebrated Yet, despite the cultural and historical differences that separate modern working women's same-sex relationships from those of their mid-Victorian counterparts, Orbach and Eichenbaum's study provides a useful perspective from which to consider how the hierarchical workplace, as an enabling space for the expression of feminine authority, shaped the dynamics of female intimacy.

That some of their claims regarding the hostile nature of women's working relationships are applicable to Brontë's own experiences of teaching in Madame Heger's pensionatt is evidenced in the account she gave to Emily in May 1842 about the relationships that existed there between her fellow teachers: 'Mdlle Blanche and Mdlle Haussé', she told her sister, 'are at present on a system of war without quarter.

[177] Orbach and Eichenbaum, *Between Women*, p. 31.
[178] Orbach and Eichenbaum, *Between Women*, p. 31. Interestingly, this claim appears to validate the alarmist assertions made a century earlier by the ardent anti-feminist Eliza Lynn Linton. In her notorious 'Wild Women' articles of 1890s, for example, Linton argued that women's admittance into the traditionally male spheres of work, education and politics had made them "mannish".

They hate each other like two cats'.[179] Notably, Brontë attributes the main cause of enmity amongst these teachers to the Parisian Mademoiselle Blanche:

> I find also that Mdlle Sophie dislikes Mdlle Blanche extremely. She says she is heartless, insincere, and vindictive, which epithets, I assure you, are richly deserved.[180]

Brontë's own unfavourable opinion of Mademoiselle Blanche, however, is likely to have been compounded by a cooling in the future author's relationship with her employer Madame Heger. As both Frederika Macdonald and Margaret Smith have suggested, Madame Heger appears to have become 'increasingly distrustful' of Brontë's growing regard for her husband and, in a diplomatic attempt to resolve the situation, encouraged Brontë to seek companionship amongst her fellow colleagues.[181] Although resistant to the idea of becoming 'intimate friends' with any of them, Brontë's belief that Mademoiselle Blanche had become 'a regular spy of Mme Heger' seems to have produced a particularly acute bond of enmity between the two women.[182] Having complained bitterly the following month to Ellen Nussey that she had been knowingly abandoned to abject solitude by her employer, Brontë demonstrates a strikingly different attitude when finding herself in the exclusive company of Mademoiselle Blanche during a week of the September holiday period:

> This week, as no teacher is here except Mdlle Blanche, who has returned from Paris, I am always alone except for meal times, for Mdlle Blanches' character is so false and contemptible I can't force myself to associate with her. She perceives my utter dislike and never now speaks to me – a great relief.[183]

Brontë gives no indication of any explicit hierarchical difference in their respective roles as teachers, and her animosity appears to be primarily based on personal aversion. However, there is a possible hint in Brontë's complaints that her particular resentment towards Mademoiselle Blanche is partly informed by the fact that her fellow colleague had been entrusted by Madame Heger to act as an agent of surveillance, whilst she (Brontë) had become the object of her employer's mistrust.

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[179] Brontë, Letter to Emily J. Brontë, 29 May 1843, in Smith (ed.), *The Letters*, Vol. I, p. 319.
[180] Brontë, Letter to Emily J. Brontë, 29 May 1843, in Smith (ed.), *The Letters*, Vol. I, p. 319.
[181] Smith (ed.), *The Letters*, Vol. I, p. 320; Macdonald, *The Secret of Charlotte Bronte*, p. 54.
[182] Brontë, Letter to Emily J. Brontë, 29 May 1843, in Smith (ed.), *The Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 320, 319.
[183] Brontë, Letter to Emily J. Brontë, 2 September 1843, in Smith (ed.), *The Letters*, Vol. I, p. 329.

In her final novel, however, Brontë offers a fictional portrait in which the hierarchical structure of a continental pensionnat is explicitly shown to be productive of the kind of feminine hostility described in Orbach and Eichenbaum's analysis of the modern female work environment. One might observe, for instance, a highly suggestive parallel between their description of the rivalry that took place between colleagues who sought the approval and recognition of their female supervisors, and Brontë's depiction of Lucy's implicit endeavour to solicit Madame Beck's disapproval, if not removal, of St Pierre in the episode briefly discussed above. It is, however, Orbach and Eichenbaum's account of women's problematic relationships with their female superiors, or other women in positions of authority, that has a particular resonance with Brontë's portrait of Lucy's ambivalent relationship with Madame Beck. As noted previously, Madame Beck was not only one of the few women whom Lucy 'liked', but, as an accomplished and capable figure of female authority, she was also held in great esteem by the younger woman. Lucy's admiration for Madame Beck, however, is quickly disturbed when she experiences first-hand the full extent of her employer's uniquely proficient methods of management. Initially occupying an obscure position within Madame Beck's household as nursery governess, and relatively content to remain undisturbed by 'heavy anxiety, and relieved from intimate trial', Lucy's relationship with Madame Beck becomes more complex when she is coerced by the directress into undertaking an impromptu role as the replacement for an absent English master (V, p. 139). Although, at first, Lucy is resistant to Madame Beck's appeal for assistance, feigning 'incapacity and impracticability' as a means to avoid the potential humiliation inflicted by sixty students, the thought of which reduces her to tears, Lucy is nevertheless swiftly overpowered by the sheer force of her employer's determination (V, p. 139). Notably, presupposing Orbach and Eichenbaum's later claims, Lucy specifically conceptualises her commanding female employer in terms of a pseudo masculinity that generates 'antipathy' between the two women (V, p. 141). 'At that instant', Lucy declared, 'she did not wear a woman's aspect, but rather a man's. Power of a particular kind limned itself in all her traits, and that power was not *my* kind of power […]. It seemed as if a challenge of strength between opposing gifts was given […]' (V, p. 141; author's emphasis). Despite the resentment and anxiety this confrontation arouses in Lucy, her responses in this episode are somewhat

paradoxical. The antipathy she feels towards Madame Beck is also directed inward as Lucy reproaches herself for not being more like her employer. As she openly admits, she had not only been prompted to define herself in opposition to Madame Beck but was also compelled to confront her own 'cowardice' which threatened to condemn her to a life of compromised mediocrity and subsistence (V, p. 139). The 'challenge' posed by her employer, Lucy confesses, had 'suddenly' made her feel 'all the dishonour' of her 'diffidence – all the pusillanimity' of her 'slackness to aspire' (V, p. 141). The conflict provoked by Madame Beck's insistence, however, although provocative of an uncomfortable epiphany for Lucy, also functions as an important catalyst for her ensuing transformation into a woman of ambition. Roused from her apathy, Lucy subsequently commits herself to pursuing a career as one of Madame Beck's teachers and becomes, by her own admission, 'a rising character' (V, p. 394).

Accompanying this transformation, however, is a change in the dynamics of the two women's relationship, which is chiefly manifest in Lucy's increasing fascination with and imitation of the directress. In fact, having once admired Madame Beck from afar, Brontë's heroine literally refashions herself into the image of her employer as she emerges from 'nursery obscurity' to the centre of her employer's establishment (V, p. 140). Taking her cue, for instance, from Madame Beck's well-known system of espionage, Lucy develops a similar propensity for covertly watching and listening to others from behind doors. Whilst, on one occasion, St Pierre becomes the focus of Lucy's particular interest (V, p. 196), more often than not, it is Madame Beck who is destined to become the object of Lucy's gaze. On these occasions, however, the politics of espionage are transformed into the delights of voyeurism. Having discovered Madame Beck searching her workbox, for example, Lucy experiences 'a secret glee' at being afforded the opportunity to covertly observe her employer's own clandestine activity. She was 'fascinated', she claims, almost to the point of being transfixed as she watched Madame Beck carefully and delicately handle her belongings, but was compelled to 'break this spell' for fear of her own discovery (V, p. 186). Whilst, on this occasion, the potentially erotic implications of Lucy's fascination are only hinted at, elsewhere in the novel Lucy reveals more fully the pleasure she derives from looking at the older woman. Whilst Madame Beck was 'without beauty', or 'youth', her well-preserved

'wholesome fruit-like bloom' appears to have frequently incited Lucy's gaze. Indeed Lucy confesses that she 'never tired of seeing her' (V, p. 167).

Nowhere, however, is Lucy's attraction to Madame Beck, or her attempt to refashion herself as her employer, made more apparent than during the annual gala fete organised in the honour of said directress. Once again Lucy echoes her employer by replicating the older woman's clandestine practice of observation. During the proceedings of the gala, for instance, Lucy deliberately removed herself to 'a quiet nook, whence unobserved [she] could observe', whilst Madame Beck who, 'with her own personal surveillance – kept far aloof at the remotest […] darkest side of the carre' (V, pp. 211, 213). Madame's honorary fête, however, is an occasion when Lucy's emulation becomes more pronounced and which is explicitly demonstrated by her choice of attire. Unlike the 'gala uniform' of 'clear white' 'diaphanous' muslin worn by Madame Beck's pupils and St Pierre, Lucy decides upon wearing a muted 'gown of shadow' (V, p. 200). Ostensibly, she explains her non-conformity to this tradition as an absence of 'courage' on her own part to wear a 'transparent' dress (V, p. 200). Yet her revelation that Madame Beck 'kept her in countenance' and that the directress's 'dress was almost as quiet as' her own is highly suggestive that Lucy's choice of attire was motivated by a continued desire to replicate her employer (V, p. 200). In her own reading of this scene, Marcus accepts, without questioning, Lucy's explanation to suggest that the contrasting hyperfemininity of the other younger women at the gala undoes Lucy's own fragile sense of femininity 'instead of bolstering it' (BW, p. 104). 'Gazing at [these] other women', she argues, 'does not produce identification but radical erasure' (BW, p. 102). By overlooking Lucy's similarity to Madame Beck in this scene, however, and failing to note Lucy's (sometimes erotic) fascination with her employer, Marcus fails to recognise Lucy's premeditated and concerted endeavour to identify with the alternative model of femininity upheld by her employer. As Beth Newman has noted, Lucy 'goes to a great deal of trouble to acquire' this dress.[184] Equally significant, however, is Lucy's vehement refusal to relinquish this garment when she is coerced into performing as a fop at the gala's theatrical production. Risking the wrath of Paul Emanuel and prepared only to compromise by wearing a paletôt over her dress, Lucy performs dressed as half-man and half-women. Arguably, given the

[184] Beth Newman, *Subjects on Display: Psychoanalysis, Social Expectation, Victorian Femininity* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2004), p. 53.

context in which Lucy's performance take place, the play is somewhat symbolically significant to Lucy, echoing Madame Beck's earlier attempt to coerce her into replacing the absent English master. On this occasion, however, Lucy demonstrates a resolve that had previously lain dormant, and suddenly discovers that, like Madame Beck's, her own (performance of) hybridized gender is particularly potent after she finds that 'the right power had come' (V, p. 210). Effectively, Lucy's performance becomes, in part, a means to display herself as an incarnation of Madame Beck to Madame Beck.

Marcus has suggested that Lucy's performance demonstrates how 'Lucy's desire for Ginevra is inseparable from erotic contests' (BW, p. 104). Having become aware that Ginevra was directing her own performance toward Dr John in the audience, Lucy enthusiastically takes up her role as foppish suitor to Ginevra's flirt, Marcus argues, 'not in order to woo Ginevra' but to 'punish' him 'for having effaced her by preferring Ginevra' (BW, p. 105). Although (surprisingly) Marcus makes no reference, her claim that this 'erotic contest' creates a bond between two women that 'eclipses' the male object of that rivalry is clearly a gender-inverted revision of Eve Sedgwick's analysis of male homosocial bonding. Whilst misreading Ginevra as Lucy's primary rival in the novel, Marcus's gender inverted use of Sedgwick's theory is nonetheless helpful in understanding further Lucy's relationship with Madame Beck, and, specifically, the hostile undercurrents that run parallel to her attraction and admiration.

Of particular importance in Sedgwick's analysis is her underlying claim that women are deployed as a conduit through which men can establish ardent or erotic bonds with one another. Thus, the status of the woman as an object of desire is secondary or subordinate. '[T]he choice of the [female] beloved', Sedgwick argues, 'is determined in the first place, not by the qualities of the beloved, but by the beloved's already being the choice of the person who has been chosen as a rival'.[185] Whilst Sedgwick explains this erotic negotiation of same-sex male desire as being necessitated by specific cultural anxieties regarding male homosexuality, the principal dynamics of this triangulated erotic rivalry are no less evident in Brontë's depiction of Lucy's relationship with Madame Beck. That is to say, on two occasions these women are drawn together by their shared romantic interest in the

[185] Sedgwick, *Between Men*, p. 21.

same man: first with Dr John, and then subsequently with Paul Emanuel. In fact, Sedgwick's suggestion that one suitor's attraction to a beloved is instigated by the beloved already being the choice of the suitor's chosen rival is revealed as informing Lucy's romantic interest in both these men. Lucy's desire for Dr John, for instance, is first preceded by her awareness of Madame Beck's attraction to the young medic. Lucy not only remarks upon Madame Beck's 'pleased' response to his 'compliment[s]' but also notes a distinct change in the directress's attendance to her appearance. Madame Beck, Lucy observes, made 'a point of personally receiving his visits with […] the same sunshine for himself', and, at 'about this time, [paid] marked attention to dress' (V, pp. 162, 166-167). Madame Beck's sudden care in her appearance, however, also heightens Lucy's appreciation of her employer's charms. As noted above, Lucy never found that her pleasure in looking at her employer at this time was ever exhausted.

Lucy's second (although primary) romantic interest, Paul Emanuel, generates a far less benign relationship between Madame Beck and Lucy, however. Although it is only towards the very end of the novel that it becomes clear these two women have been engaged in an erotic contest with one another for Paul Emanuel, the nature of both contest and Lucy's explicit disclosure is hostile:

> 'Dog in the manger!' I said; for I knew she secretly wanted him, and had always wanted him. She called him 'insupportable;' she railed at him for a 'dévot;'she did not love, but she wanted to marry, that she might bind him to her interest. Deep into some of Madame's secrets I had entered – I know not how; by an intuition or an inspiration which came to me – I know not whence. In the course of living with her, too, I had slowly learned, that, unless with an inferior, she must ever be a rival. She was *my* rival, heart and soul, though secretly, under the smoothest bearing, and utterly unknown to all save her and myself (V, p. 544).

Lucy's declaration is significant not only because it discloses Madame Beck's and her own mutual desire for Paul Emanuel but also because it exposes Lucy's romantic interest partly as a deliberate attempt to facilitate an antagonistic bond with her employer. Lucy reveals that she was fully aware that the romantic inclinations she harboured for the school master would inevitably draw her into conflict with her employer. Indeed, her belated admission compels us to understand their relationship

as ‘always’ being one of mutually acknowledged ‘rivalry’. Lucy’s primary desire was therefore not necessarily to marry Paul Emanuel but to prevent her employer from doing so. Lucy, for instance, was apparently ‘content’ to accept Paul’s ‘voluntary self-offering’ of fraternal ‘friendship’ (V, pp. 501, 500). There is, however, one notable stipulation to Lucy’s reciprocation of a ‘sister’s pure affection’ (V, p. 501). Whilst she ‘was willing to be his sister’, this was only ‘on condition that he did not invite [her] to fill that relation to some future wife of his’ (V, p. 503).

Conclusion

That Brontë chooses to end her novel with neither its heroine nor her ‘rival’ Madame Beck fulfilling their romantic ambitions (and marrying Paul Emanuel) would perhaps seem to confirm Marcus’s claim that *Villette* was an exception amongst Victorian novels in its failure to reiterate cultural ideals regarding the alliance between anterior bonds of altruistic female amity and companionate marriage. As has been previously noted, however, in its depiction of Lucy’s relationship with Paulina (and Dr John), Brontë’s novel fully accords with this ideal. In addition, though, to this oversight Marcus also fails to note that the novel concludes with Lucy fulfilling her *professional* ambitions by succeeding in emulating Madame Beck, and establishing a pensionnat that has, in part been financed by her former employer Miss Marchmont. The novel’s denouement consolidates an important narrative in *Villette* that is plainly in sight: female intimacy and employment.

Whilst it would be unwise to simply read *Villette* as an autobiographical fantasy, Brontë’s novel nevertheless registers the existence and the dilemmas of a significant number of women from the middle classes who, like herself had been compelled to seek female friendship in the workplace. Although Brontë may have been unsuccessful in her attempts to form a bond of mutual interest or perhaps companionship with Mrs Sidgwick, that there were instances of female intimacy between employers and employees is certainly evidenced in the lifewriting of Ellen Weeton. Indeed, Weeton’s journal reveals that employment might be regarded by some as a valuable means by which to gain companionship. Weeton’s lifewriting, however, also draws attention to the complicating issue of social class for women of

the middle-sectors of society for whom work was a necessity. Yet as both Weeton and Wollstonecraft's accounts reveal (and Brontë's novel echoes), hierarchical cross-class relationships between female employers and employees could result in complex bonds of homosocial desire and, for Wollstonecraft's employer Lady Kingsborough, and Brontë's heroine Lucy Snowe, homoerotic fascination.

Chapter II

Conflicts of Interest: Professional Women Writers

The publication of Dinah Mulock Craik's second novel, *Olive*, in 1850, consolidated a departure both from her earlier literary work and reputation. Prior to her first endeavour as a novelist, Craik had already successfully established a literary career of some repute as the writer of children's stories, as well as a contributor of poems, essays, and articles to a variety of periodicals.[1] Having first published a poem in the *Staffordshire Advertiser* in 1841 at the age of fifteen, by 1846 Craik (still then Mulock) was regularly contributing her poems and tales to *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* as well as translations of French pieces for its 'Column for Young People'.[2] In 1849 Craik made her debut as a novelist, publishing her first three volume novel, *The Ogilvies.* Sally Mitchell has noted that although Craik's first novel was generally well received, it was considered by most critics to be 'immature'.[3] However, the decision of her publisher, Edward Chapman, not to reduce what was at that time an already comparatively generous payment for her second novel, *Olive*, testifies to an astute note of early confidence in Craik's future as novelist. That is to say, by the time of her death in 1887, the *Academy* retrospectively estimated Craik's popularity as a novelist as being second only to Dickens's.[4] Indeed, Chapman's faith in Craik's potential success as a writer of the three-volume novel might be seen to have been validated by some of the comments made in a number of reviews for her second novel, *Olive*. The *Examiner*, for instance, whilst arguing the novel suffered from 'the same kind of defects' as *The Ogilvies*, nevertheless claimed that *Olive* had fulfilled the 'promise' of the first novel.[5] Other critics commenting on *Olive* also praised Craik for her apparent singularity amongst other novelists of the day. One review in the *Leader*, possibly by George Henry Lewes, suggested that *Olive*

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[1] Cora Kaplan, 'Introduction' in Dinah Mulock Craik, *Olive* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). Kaplan notes that by the time Craik came to publish the novel she 'was already something of a youthful phenomenon on the literary scene', p. ix.
[2] Sally Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik* (Boston: Twayne, 1983), p. 7.
[3] Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik*, p. 29.
[4] The *Academy* claimed that Craik's novels 'were more widely read than are the productions of any other writer after Dickens', 'Obituary', *Academy* (October 22, 1887), pp. 269-270, p. 269. Obviously, caution should be given to this comment as it is to be noted that Craik had died ten days earlier.
[5] Anonymous, 'The Literary Examiner' in the *Examiner*, (November 6 1850), pp. 734-735, p. 734.

demonstrated that Craik's 'writing [was] of a more sustained excellence than we commonly find', whilst another, in the *Weekly News,* claimed that *Olive* was written by an author who displayed a 'depth of thought and feeling which [was] by no means common'.[6] In fact, the *Weekly News* suggested that Craik's abilities had enabled her to write a novel of particular lasting worth which transcended the realms of ephemeral amusement usually associated with the domestic novel. Craik's 'power' as an author, it was suggested, gave 'her story a value beyond the momentary entertainment usually afforded by works of this class'.[7]

Throughout the following decade Craik continued to be regarded as an important and prominent novelist. In 1852 she was notably lauded in the *Westminster Review* by George Henry Lewes who regarded her then as an emerging novelist of 'considerable power'.[8] In 1858, John Cordy Jeafferson suggested that 'as a painter of domestic life and delineator of rural manners', Craik 'is unequalled'.[9] Perhaps surprisingly, even her fiercely competitive contemporary Eliza Lynn Linton, acknowledged Craik's dominant stature. Despite being 'deeply hurt and shaken' by the decision of Ibister, the publisher of *Good Words,* to renege on an earlier verbal agreement to serially publish Linton's novel, *Patricia Kemball,* and choosing instead the work of Craik, Linton conceded that she would 'make no remonstrance. I thought her name wd. draw more than mine'.[10] Craik became a novelist whose own particular talent for writing domestic fiction was frequently applauded by critics, her name being placed alongside such literary luminaries as Elizabeth Gaskell, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot. Such high regard and favourable comparisons, though, were not always welcomed by those with whom she was being likened. According to Sally Mitchell, Brontë 'evidently found […] amusing' Sydney Dobell's claim that she and Craik were 'kindred stars reflecting

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[6] Anonymous, 'Olive: A Novel', *The Leader* (November 23 1850), pp. 833-834, p. 833; *Weekly News* quoted in *The Examiner*, (December 7, 1850), p. 793.
[7] Anonymous, *Weekly News,* quoted in *The Examiner*, p. 734.
[8] George Henry Lewes, 'The Lady Novelists', in *Westminster Review*, (July 1852), pp. 129-141, p. 141.
[9] John Cordy Jeafferson, *Novels and Novelists from Elizabeth to Victoria*, Vol.2 (London: Hurst & Black, 1858), p.380, quoted in Monica Correa Fryckstedt, 'Defining the Domestic Genre: English Women Novelists of the 1850s' in *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Spring, 1987), pp. 9-25, p. 19.
[10] Letter; Eliza Lynn Linton to George Bentley, 3rd January, 1874, quoted in Nancy Fix Anderson, *Woman Against Women*, p. 150.

each other's light'.[11] George Eliot, however, was rather more indignant when a French journalist suggested that she was a rival of Craik:

> the most ignorant journalist in England would hardly think of calling me a rival of Miss Mulock – a writer who is read only by novel-readers, pure and simple, never by people of high culture. A very excellent woman she is, I believe, but we belong to an entirely different order of writers.[12]

Elaine Showalter has argued that Eliot's annoyance was indicative of an acute awareness of the manner in which the work of women novelists was evaluated by a predominantly male literary establishment which failed to critically discriminate between the varied abilities of women writers. Any 'intellectual differences between [Eliot's] books and those of lesser [female] talents', Showalter suggests, were seen by Eliot to have been simply 'cancelled out' because of 'their shared womanhood'.[13] Eliot's suggestion, however, that her own fiction, unlike Craik's, was directed toward, and appreciated by, the tastes and sensibilities of an implicitly authoritive masculine readership of 'high culture' is perhaps illustrative of Eliot's recognition of the high status she had already achieved amongst a community of women writers.

This is indicative of the complex struggles with the prejudices of contemporary gender ideology, and the attempts by these writers to implicitly *deploy* this ideology in order to define themselves hierarchically against one another. Margaret Oliphant, for instance, fellow novelist and friend of Craik, made a similar suggestion to that of Eliot. Whilst declaring that Craik's most successful novel, *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1856), had 'raised her at once to a high position', Oliphant, nevertheless, attempts to qualify Craik's status by suggesting that it should only be considered in the context of less extraordinary novelists: 'I will not say in literature, but among the novel-writers of our species'.[14] Thus, rather than view Eliot's comments about Craik as simply being representative of her frustration at a lack of

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[11] Sidney Dobell, quoted in Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik*, p. 118.
[12] George Eliot, Letter to François D'Albert-Durade, June 7, 1860, in Gordon S. Haight (ed) *The George Eliot Letters Vol.III, 1859-1861* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 302.
[13] Elaine Showalter, 'Dinah Mulock Craik and the Tactics of Sentiment: A Case Study in Victorian Female Authorship', in *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 2 No. 2/3 (1975), pp. 5-23, p. 6.
[14] Margaret Oliphant, *The Autobiography and Letters of Mrs M.O.W .Oliphant*, (ed.) Mrs Harry Coghill (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1899), p. 83.

cultural recognition by an elite (masculine) literary establishment, it might be more productive to consider Eliot's response as being, in part, evidence of an anxious attempt to maintain and safeguard an already highly acclaimed position which some of her less successful fellow female novelists may have resented. Indeed, Oliphant, both a novelist and a reader for Blackwood's, the publisher of Eliot's work, whilst lamenting the fact that her own name would never be 'mention[ed] […] in the same breath with George Eliot', also declared that Eliot's professional self-regard was one of 'tremendous seriousness' and that Eliot 'was always on duty, never relaxing'.[15] Eliza Lynn Linton also admitted to finding Eliot's 'sense of her own [self] importance as the great novelist and profound thinker of her generation […] a little overwhelming'.[16] Whilst she claimed that she had initially 'acknowledged […] with enthusiasm' Eliot's 'superiority', Linton argued that 'success and adulation had spoilt' Eliot, and that Eliot 'grew to be [….] pretentious'.[17] In keeping with these comments, it is important to note that at the time Eliot (privately) made her disparaging remarks regarding Craik's status as a novelist who wrote for an apparently unsophisticated readership, Eliot's own fictional work had already been lauded in some notable quarters of a male cultural elite. Whilst the removal of Eliot's incognito may have prompted the *Athenæum* to ungenerously revise its original assessment of her novel, *Adam Bede* (1859), from being 'a work of genius' and a 'novel of the highest class' to a 'tale' that had 'no great quality of any kind', this type of negative impact which accompanied an awareness of Eliot's (female) identity was by no means universal.[18] Herbert Spencer, a friend of Lewes, for instance, declared in a letter to Eliot that the novel 'possesse[d] *all* the requisite qualities' of his own 'ideal of a work of art'.[19] Perhaps somewhat less partisan than Spencer, Eneas Dallas, in his long reviews of Eliot's novels for *The Times*, also maintained his high regard for Eliot, subsequent to the revelation of her identity. In April 1859 he had declared *Adam Bede* to be 'a first-rate novel' and suggested that

[15] Oliphant, *Autobiography*, p. 7.
[16] Eliza Lynn Linton, *My Literary Life* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1899), p. 99.
[17] Linton, *Literary Life*, p. 97.
[18] Geraldine Jewsbury, 'New Novels', *Athenaeum* (February 26, 1859), p. 284; William Hepworth Dixon, 'Our Weekly Gossip', *Athenæum* (July 2, 1859), p. 20.
[19] Herbert Spencer, Letter to George Eliot, September 30, 1859, in Gordon S. Haight (ed), *Selections from George Eliot's Letters* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 224. Editor's emphasis.

'its [by then still unknown] author takes rank at once among the masters of the art'.[20] Following the publication of Eliot's third novel, *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), Dallas wrote that 'George Eliot is as great as ever'.[21]

Eliot's response to claims that likened her to Craik might, as Deirdre David has suggested, evidence Eliot's own unavoidable complicity with the inherent patriarchal values of the literary establishment.[22] Moreover, Eliot's comments might also be seen to be indicative of the more generally widespread (professional) insecurities and dichotomies faced by women writers in their attempts to define themselves not only against their male counterparts but also against each other. Mrs Oliphant, for example, confessed in her autobiography that 'she could not help comparing herself' to Charlotte Brontë after having read an account of the latter.[23] As with her earlier analysis of Eliot, Oliphant's evaluation served to generate feelings of inadequacy: 'I don't suppose my powers are equal to hers – my work to myself looks perfectly pale and colourless besides hers'.[24] Despite the self-deprecation, however, Oliphant's comparison was, as Showalter has noted, not without an element of 'self-congratulation'.[25] In fact, despite the unfavourable account Oliphant gives of her own abilities as a novelist, she nevertheless attempts to signal the importance of her own fiction over that of Brontë's by pointing to the respective gendered focus each brings to their work. Whilst conceding that her own fiction lacked the passion of Brontë's, Oliphant defensively argued that she 'had far more experience and […] a fuller conception of life' than her more successful counterpart.[26] She had, she claimed, 'learned to take […] more a man's view of mortal affairs – to feel that the love between men and women, the marrying and giving in marriage, occupy in fact so small a portion of either existence or thought'.[27] Implicit in Oliphant's comments, therefore, is the suggestion that, unlike her own, Brontë's fiction was limited by its preoccupation with romantic adventure which specifically appealed to the narrow interests and expectations of women. It is also worth noting here that Oliphant's attempt to bolster her somewhat fragile self-

[20] Eneas Sweetland Dallas, 'Adam Bede', *The Times*, (April 12 1859), p. 5.
[21] Dallas, 'The Mill on the Floss', *The Times* (May 19 1860), p. 10.
[22] Deirdre David, *Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy: Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot* (London: MacMillan Press, 1987), p. 225.
[23] Oliphant, *Autobiography*, p. 67.
[24] Oliphant, *Autobiography*, p. 67.
[25] Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, p. 106.
[26] Oliphant, *Autobiography*, p. 67.
[27] Oliphant, *Autobiography*, p. 67.

esteem by claiming for herself a greater involvement with and understanding of issues more readily associated with a masculine sphere of activity echo earlier critical endorsements of Eliot's fiction. In its review of *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), for instance, *The Critic* had concluded that Eliot's third novel evidenced the work of 'two separate minds'.[28] Whilst the anonymous reviewer claimed that Eliot's novel was predominantly the work of a feminine mind inevitably acquainted with, and therefore fully able to authentically render visible, the 'inner workings of a woman's heart', the reviewer also suggested that there was evidence of a valuable masculine contribution to the novel's composition.[29] Although 'the male mind' had 'evidently played a subordinate part' in the novel's construction, this contribution, the reviewer argued, was of no less importance to the overall success of the novel: 'With fuller and wider knowledge than its companion spirit of the world […], it has been enabled to fill up the picture with a vast number of details, not perhaps very important in themselves individually, yet adding to the value of the whole'.[30]

Responses to the gender biased politics that informed the critical reception of women's writing varied, however. Linton, for example, after having published her scandalous third novel, *Realties* (1851), and finding herself in the literary wilderness of freelance journalism, accepted a position with *The Saturday Review* with the specific remit of evaluating novels written by women. In accordance with its editor's 'deliberate plan to set woman against woman, and to see who would make the best fight of it', Linton responded by assailing her fellow women writers 'with a ferocity hardly equalled by her male colleagues'.[31] Charlotte Brontë, however, although condemning her sister Anne's novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, as a 'mistake', and attributing its failings to the misconceptions of an 'inexperienced writer', declared to Elizabeth Gaskell that the male-dominated literary establishment 'shall not make us foes'.[32] Moreover, Brontë explicitly revealed her resentment regarding the implication of gender politics in literary criticism in a letter to Lewes who had

[28] Unsigned, 'The Mill on the Floss', *The Critic*, Vol. 20, No. 510 (April 14 1860), pp. 458-459, p.458.
[29] Unsigned, 'The Mill on the Floss', *The Critic*, p. 458.
[30] Unsigned, 'The Mill on the Floss', *The Critic*, p. 458.
[31] Clement Scott, *The Drama of Yesterday and Today*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1899), vol.1, p. 422; Merle Bevington, *The Saturday Review, 1855-1868* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1941), p. 34; both quoted in Anderson, *Woman Against Women*, p. 119.
[32]Charlotte Brontë, quoted in Elizabeth Langland, *Telling Tales: Gender and Narrative Form in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Ohio University State Press: Columbus, 2002), p. 30; quoted in Elaine Showalter *A Literature Of Their Own* (London: Virago Press, 1988), p. 73.

informed her that he was about to review her latest novel, *Shirley* (1849). Arguing that a fair and valid assessment of her work was impossible because it was 'measur[ed] […] by some standard of what [was] deem[ed] becoming to [her] sex', Brontë told Lewes that she 'wish[ed] all reviewers [Lewes included] believed 'Currer Bell' to be a man' because 'they would be more just to him'.[33] Similarly, Craik, whilst acknowledging 'in a general sense' conventional notions of gender hierarchy, also insisted that an author should be considered as a 'neutral being' and 'judged solely by "its" work'.[34] Like Brontë, Craik appeared to reject the possibility that a female novelist might 'exact consideration merely on account of her sex' and refuted prejudiced gender assumptions that also systematically subordinated the status of women's writing purely on the grounds of gender.[35] '[I]n literature' she argued 'we meet men on level ground'.[36] Craik's argument, however, that literary women were as 'acute and accurate historians, [and] clear explanators of science' as men is somewhat undermined by her seemingly bold assertion that 'the best of […] women' would 'often beat [men] in their *own* field'.[37] That is to say, despite her confident declaration of parity Craik implicitly reveals a sense of cultural trespass by women.

Thus contemporary beliefs in gender hierarchy might be seen to have been of concern for many of these women writers and, like Eliot, they were unavoidably implicated in employing these beliefs as a means by which they could attempt to negotiate a valid space in the literary market for their own work. Craik, in particular, appears to have deployed gender discourse in an attempt to justify her unconventional role as a professional woman novelist. Although there is evidence in Craik's *A Woman's Thoughts About Women* (1858) to support Showalter's claim that Craik shared Eliot's 'insist[ence]' that women writers must regard literature seriously, and that 'they must not […] confuse their feminine and their professional roles', Craik did, in fact, in the same text, conflate contemporary images of a

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[33] Charlotte Brontë, letter to George Henry Lewes, November 1st, 1849 in Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1895), pp. 308-309.
[34] Dinah Mulock, 'To Novelists, and a Novelist', in Dinah Mulock Craik, *The Unkind Word and Other Stories* (New York: Books for Library Press, 1969), p. 197; first published in *MacMillan's Magazine*, No. 3, 1861.
[35] Dinah Mulock Craik, *A Woman's Thoughts About Women* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1858), p. 57.
[36] Craik, *A Woman's Thoughts,* p. 50.
[37] Craik, *A Woman's Thoughts,* p. 50. My emphasis.

domestic middle-class feminine ideal with her own status as a successful author.[38] In describing her novels as the 'errant children of [her] brain', and by depicting herself sitting 'quiet[ly] by [her] chimney corner', for instance, Craik appears to endorse her claim that she 'live[d] a life as simple and peaceful, as any happy common woman'.[39] Such comments, however, contrast sharply with Oliphant's description of Craik terrifying her publisher, Henry Blackett, with her 'sturdy business-like stand for her money'.[40] Arguably, Craik's conflation of contented maternal domesticity with the role of female author might be considered in the context of what Tess Cosslett has identified as the Victorian woman writer's strategy of 'negotiation'.[41] According to Cosslett, the apparent conflicts of interest between an adherence to conservative femininity and the role of the professional woman writer, which was associated with a masculine public sphere, generated an anxious need for resolution. This obvious contradiction, Cosslett argues, was reconciled through the common Victorian novelistic trait of juxtaposing an unconventional heroine (representative of the authoress) alongside her more 'angelic conventional friends'.[42] It was by the means of negotiated identities, in which the unconventional heroine is '*overawed*' by the goodness of her angelic friend whilst also maintaining her difference and 'superiority' that Cosslett suggests the woman writer was able to reconcile 'her own sense of exceptionality […] with her ideological bonds to traditional womanhood'.[43] Thus, Craik's 1858 domestic self-portrait was, to a certain degree, a similar attempt at reconciling her feminine and professional roles. By appropriating metaphorically the ideals of a middle-class feminine social identity in her depiction of the professional woman writer, Craik was able to downplay her own rather less 'common' public identity. Furthermore, Craik's comments might also be viewed as an effort to alleviate the implicit unease concerning the woman writer's cultural infringement revealed in her bold declaration regarding their talents and abilities.

A later article, however, which also draws upon the middle-class ideals of domestic femininity, extends Craik's implicit self-justification and appears to be deployed to counter the irrefutable success of Eliot's recently published novel, *The*

[38] Showalter *A Literature Of Their Own*, p. 45.
[39] Craik, *A Woman's Thoughts*, p. 58.
[40] Oliphant, *Autobiography*, p. 102.
[41] Cosslett, *Woman To Woman*, p. 4.
[42] Cosslett, *Woman To Woman*, p. 6.
[43] Cosslett, *Woman To Woman*, p. 6. Cosslett's emphasis.

Mill on the Floss (1860). In 1861, directly 'appeal[ing]' to, rather than offering 'criticism' of Eliot, Craik published 'To Novelists, and a Novelist' in *Macmillan's Magazine* in which she discussed what she considered not only to be the merits but also the deficiencies of Eliot's latest highly-acclaimed, and hugely successful novel.[44] Whilst notably praising Eliot's novel for its 'intellectual power' and artistic 'perfect[ion]', she nevertheless, argued that, like most 'great works', *The Mill on the Floss* (and, perhaps by association, Eliot, as its author) was flawed.[45] According to Craik, the 'highest ideal' for any novel was its 'moral idea' which, 'beyond any intellectual perfection', was something a 'true author ought to strive' to convey.[46] The novelist was, Craik argued, no longer 'a mere story-teller or romanticist' but someone burdened with the heavy responsibility of replicating life in such a way as to be of 'benefit' to mankind.[47] By shifting her analysis of Eliot's novel from a 'literary point of view' based explicitly on the criteria of intellect and aesthetics, Craik's article appears to reject the impositions of an elite masculine 'high culture' by which Eliot assessed fiction; both her own and, perhaps more importantly for Craik, that of other contemporary women writers like herself.[48] As an example of 'exquisite literary skill', Eliot's novel, Craik suggested, was 'perfect'.[49] When examined, however, from 'another point of view', through which it might offer 'comfort [to] the sorrowful' or 'succor the tempted', Eliot's great literary achievement, according to Craik, offered only '[s]ilence'.[50] Significantly, Craik's article appears to confront Eliot's masculine elitism by also appealing to contemporary gender ideology. The novel, like Ellis's ideal middle-class woman of England, who exerted a seemingly unlimited moral influence, both in the home and 'in society at large' was, according to Craik, 'one of the most important moral agents of the community'.[51] In fact, once again, Craik situates the novelist in the very heart of the domestic sphere and conflates 'him' with the ideal of an inconspicuous middle-class mistress of the house: 'He creeps innocently on our family table in the shapes of those three well-thumbed library volumes - sits for days

[44] Craik, 'To Novelists', p. 199.
[45] Craik, 'To Novelists', pp. 199, 198.
[46] Craik, 'To Novelists', p. 198.
[47] Craik, 'To Novelists', pp. 197, 198.
[48] Craik, 'To Novelists', p. 199.
[49] Craik, 'To Novelists', p. 201.
[50] Craik, 'To Novelists', p. 201.
[51] Ellis, *The Women of England*, p. 119; Craik, 'To Novelists', p. 196.

after invisibly at our fireside […] slowly but surely […] his opinions, ideas, feelings, impress themselves upon us'.[52]

Why Craik chose to condemn what she saw as the absence of any moral 'benefit' in Eliot's novel might perhaps, in part, be explained as an indication of Craik's suspicion that Eliot had appropriated her own best-selling novel, *John Halifax, Gentleman*. In fact, it has been suggested that Eliot may have been directly influenced by a number of Craik's novels. Deborah Wynne, for example, has forwarded the possibility that 'Eliot "borrowed" a number of details' from Craik's *A Brave Lady* for her subsequent novel, *Middlemarch*.[53] There are certainly a number of events and circumstances depicted in *The Mill on the Floss* to support the claim that Eliot had also been influenced by Craik's *John Halifax*: devastating floods; perceived or actual conspiracies to divert the water power of mills which threaten potential economic ruin; and a notable, if not perhaps rather conspicuous contrast between Halifax's adamant refusals to 'never go to the law. Never!' and Mr Tulliver's almost obsessive compulsive recourse to legal confrontation.[54] Perhaps also of note is Craik's Ursula March, who, like Eliot's Maggie Tulliver is representative of the tall, 'dark-complexioned, dark-eye d, dark-haired' female figure central in the relationships of John Halifax and Phineas Fletcher in Craik's novel, and Tom and Philip in Eliot's novel (JH, p. 97). Sally Mitchell has also suggested that Eliot's Tom Tulliver may have been influenced by Craik's John Halifax.[55] More significant, however, is Showalter's claim that 'Eliot may have intended the relationship of Philip Wakem and Tom Tulliver […] to repudiate Craik's sentimental portraits of [John] Halifax and [Phineas] Fletcher'.[56] Although Showalter acknowledges the absence of any definitive evidence that would demonstrate Craik's awareness of Eliot's possible renunciation, she nevertheless highlights as significant Craik's (aforementioned) 'long (and anonymous) essay' in which the morality of Eliot's novel was 'attacked'.[57]

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[52] Craik, 'To Novelists', p. 197.
[53] Deborah Wynne, 'George Eliot's *Middlemarch* and Dinah Mulock Craik's *A Brave Lady'* in *Notes And Queries*, Vol. 249 [New Series, Vol. 51], No. 2, June 2004, pp. 160-162, p. 162.
[54] Dinah Mulock Craik, *John Halifax, Gentleman* (London: Everyman's Library, 1906) pp. 266-267. All further references will be given in the body of the text following the initials 'JH'.
[55] Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik*, p. 52.
[56] Showalter, 'Tactics of Sentiment', p. 18.
[57] Showalter, 'Tactics of Sentiment', p. 18.

Notably, Showalter's claim that the relationship between Eliot's and Craik's novels may have represented something less innocent than a simple mechanism of influence presupposes Elizabeth Langland's concept of 'strategic intertextuality'. In particular, Langland has argued that 'one novel's engagement with another' should not be considered as 'a simple process of transmission' but rather a 'dynamic encounter' in which the discourse of one author is directly appropriated and challenged by another.[58] To support her argument Langland offers a reading of Charlotte Brontë's novel, *Jane Eyre*, and her sister Anne's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, published the following year. Noting similarities of plot in both novels, Langland argues that Anne drew upon, and then took issue with her sister's 'romantic assessment' of a morally corrupt masculinity's 'potential for reform'.[59] According to Langland, Anne's novel 'persistently question[ed] the values and premises of Charlotte's enormously successful *Jane Eyre'* which prompted 'a strongly revis[ed] view of what constitutes manliness'.[60]

Dinah Mulock Craik and George Eliot: Contested ideals of masculinity.

In the following section I provide a reading of Craik's *John Halifax, Gentleman* and Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* to highlight a similar 'dynamic encounter' between these two authors. Whilst this discussion deviates somewhat from an explicit analysis of same-sex female relationships, it is intended to evidence more conclusively Showalter's suggestion that Eliot drew upon aspects of *John Halifax, Gentleman* to directly challenge Craik's constructions of a benign masculine homosocial bond.

Fundamental to both novels is the express concern of social status amongst a number of men, and, in particular, with their desire to ascend. What differs significantly in each novel, however, is the principal motives of this ambition. Whilst Craik's orphaned hero, John Halifax, an itinerant child labourer, sought to 'climb' socially, his aspiration is shown to be inextricably linked to a philosophy of philanthropic Christianity (JH, p. 27). Whilst Halifax is determined that his family

[58] Elizabeth Langland, *Telling Tales: Gender and Narrative Form in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2002), p. 28.
[59] Langland, *Telling Tales*, p. 46.
[60] Langland, *Telling Tales*, pp. 30, 33.

should 'take [its] place […] with any gentry in the land' and after 'twenty-five years of labour' was able to move them to Beechwood Hall, the 'great house' at Enderley', his 'riches' are principally the means by which he is able to 'gain influence in the world' (JH, pp. 263, 301). As he explains to his sons, his wealth is not only of direct benefit to his family but also represents an indirect means of helping those others much less fortunate to achieve what might otherwise be their unrealised potential:

> He wished […] his sphere of usefulness […] [would] lift them high enough to help on the ever-advancing tide of human improvement […] extending outward in the world withersoever their talents or circumstances might call them (JH, pp. 301-302).

Rejecting the society of an emergent industrial aristocracy, the 'merchant princes and cotton lords', Halifax's aspiration to distinguish himself socially and economically effectively represents the means by which he can attempt to ameliorate the socio-economic differences that rigidly structure a class-based society (JH, p. 294). Moreover, in establishing himself as being both the 'best master' and 'a man of the people', Halifax's ascendancy represents an attempt to eliminate the hostility generated by those class differences.

Eliot's novel depicts masculine social ambitions to be far less altruistic or benign. Ostensibly, mill owner Mr Tulliver's initial declaration that he 'should like [his son] Tom to be a bit of a scholard' suggests only a desire for a superficial parity with the educated, professional classes, specifically embodied in the character of Lawyer Wakem.[61] Whilst he has no intention that Tom should become a miller, like himself, the apparent purpose of his resolution that Tom should receive 'a good eddication' is bound up in his desire that this education will ultimately endow his son with the outward signs of a higher echelon of middle-class status (Mill, p. 3). Effectively, Mr Tulliver resolves that Tom should be able to 'talk fine and write with a flourish' to wear 'a big watch-chain' and to be placed literally and metaphorically on 'a high stool' (Mill, p. 3). However, implicit in Mr Tulliver's declarations regarding his ambitions for his son, and later revealed in Eliot's novel, is the fact that his motives appear to be driven by an almost paranoid sense of

[61] George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1995), p.3. All further references will be given in the body of the text following the word 'Mill'.

suspicion, injustice, and social inferiority. In fact, during his discussion of Tom's future education with Mr Riley, Mr Tulliver reveals his own sense of social inadequacy in not 'having [had] better schooling' (Mill, p. 13). Finding himself increasingly 'puzzled', the unsophisticated and 'straightforrard' Mr Tulliver attributes his bewilderment to the fact that 'things have got so twisted round and wrapped up i' unreasonable words' (Mill, p. 13). More significantly, however, Mr Tulliver is aggrieved that his lack of education and inarticulacy was a contributory factor in ultimately determining his place in a hierarchically structured society. '[I]f the world had been left as God made it', Mr Tulliver argues, he 'could ha' seen [his] way, and held [his] own wi' the best of 'em' (Mill, p. 13). Thus, in his desire that Tom should become 'a bit nimble with his tongue' and somewhat more self-assured in unfamiliar company, Mr Tulliver wanted his son 'to be even' with those of the educated classes who had 'got the start' of his father (Mill, pp. 12-13). Noticeably, however, Mr Tulliver's ambitions for Tom stop short of actually wanting him to become 'a downright lawyer' because of an apparent distrust of the law (Mill, p. 3). To enter Tom into the legal profession would, according to Mr Tulliver, make him a 'raskil' (Mill, p. 3).

It is not so much the law *per se*, however, that Mr Tulliver resents but more specifically Lawyer Wakem. As he is to later confess, Mr Tulliver only wanted to 'beat' Wakem; something that he literally succeeds in doing (Mill, p. 315). In particular, when confronting Wakem, after having been relieved of the burden of debt to him by Tom's inexorable endeavours, Mr Tulliver is overcome with his own longstanding abhorrence of this 'predominant man' (Mill, p. 312). Initially causing Wakem to be thrown from his horse, Mr Tulliver is no longer able to control his loathing:

> The sight of the long-hated predominant man down and in his power, threw him into a frenzy of triumphant vengeance […]. He rushed on Wakem, […] and flogged him fiercely across the back with his riding-whip. (Mill, p. 312)

Although Craik's novel also represents hostile masculine tensions of class difference erupting into personal and physical violence, not least in Squire Birthwood's assault on John Halifax, her depiction of male friendship, nevertheless, offers a far more optimistic vision of the potential for social mobility. In fact, Craik's representation

of Phineas's and Halifax's friendship might be seen to symbolize a marriage of class difference that facilitates Halifax's social ascendancy. In particular, despite being the son of a 'gentlewoman' and Halifax's employer, Abel, who feared Phineas's friendship would improperly 'lift [Halifax] out of his place', Phineas is shown to have become instantly besotted with the 'vagabond', Halifax (JH, pp. 154, 31, 1). As he later admits, Halifax was 'everything in the world' to him (JH, p. 120). When they were separated he 'longed after' his friend, and was prepared to risk weeks of illness by visiting him at work in Abel Fletcher's tannery; and when in his company, Halifax was inescapably the focus of Phineas's 'ever-following eyes' (JH, pp. 19, 123). In fact, Phineas's desire to keep Halifax within view is shown to be inseparable from his ambitions for his friend's continued ascendancy in and importance to Abel Fletcher's business. Aware of his father's increasing regard and reliance upon his ever industrious and loyal employee, Phineas inwardly admits that his father's growing dependence on Halifax would provide the means by which he could 'draw [himself] nearer' to Halifax (JH, p. 66). It is, therefore, both Halifax himself and his continued success which form the basis of what Phineas admits to be his 'heart's desire' (JH, p. 66).

Significantly, Phineas compares this friendship to that of David and Jonathan in the Old Testament parable. The explicit use of this biblical allegory is perhaps not surprising given that Craik's later discussion of successful male friendships was also based upon this biblical friendship. In her didactic conduct text, *A Woman's Thoughts* (1858), Craik declared that even the strongest bonds of female friendship were incomparable to the devotion generated by male friendships void of self-interest. Although she suggests that these male bonds were relatively uncommon, she nevertheless declared that:

> women's friendships are rarely or never so firm, so just, or so enduring, as those of men - *when* you can find them […]. When such a bond really does exist, […] a friendship between two men is a higher thing than between any two women - nay, one of the highest and noblest sights in the whole world.[62]

Citing 'Damon and Pythias, Orestes and Pylades, Brutus and Cassius' as being well known historical instances of such ideal male friendships, significantly, Craik

[62] Craik, *A Woman's Thoughts*, pp. 166-167. Craik's emphasis.

maintained that 'last and loveliest' of these examples was that of David and Jonathan. [63]

Arguably, given the instability of gender identity which has been noted as being depicted in this Biblical homosocial bond, and which is replicated in her novel, Craik presupposes more recent critical readings of the gendered dynamics of Jonathan and David's relationship. That is to say, in using this allegory Craik symbolically portrays Phineas and Halifax's friendship as a heterosexual marriage of class difference which anticipates Yaron Peleg's suggestion that the Biblical friendship of Jonathan and David is in fact a portrayal of a heterosexual union between two men.[64] More specifically, Peleg suggests that in the justification for David's acquisition of Jonathan's rightful place as king, the Biblical text deliberately emphasises Jonathan's femininity as a means to disqualify him from his birth right. By 'describing him as effeminate', Peleg claims, 'the text does not suggest that Jonathan is 'homosexual' but rather that he is a 'woman', and, as such, unqualified for kingship'.[65] Significantly, however, Peleg suggests that the effeminized Jonathan effectively becomes David's 'female bride'.[66]

That Phineas's feminization is not merely the consequence of a retrospective imposition of feminist or queer readings is perhaps evidenced by R.H. Hutton's contemporary review of Craik's novel.[67] Whilst Henry James had denounced Craik's hugely successful novel on the grounds that there was something 'almost awful' in Craik's 'perfectly virtuous' hero, John Halifax, Hutton condemned Craik's novel because of its depiction of Phineas's gender instability.[68] More specifically, Hutton scorned the novel's other hero, Phineas, for what he regarded as Phineas's alarming level of effeminacy:

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[63] Craik, *A Woman's Thoughts*, p. 167.
[64] Yaron Peleg, 'Love at First Sight? David, Jonathan, and the Biblical Politics of Gender' in the *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Vol. 30, No. 2, (2005), pp.171-189, p. 172.
[65] Peleg, 'Love at First Sight?', p. 172.
[66] Peleg, 'Love at First Sight?', p. 172.
[67] Elaine Showalter and Sally Mitchell suggest that both Halifax and Phineas are part of a deliberate attempt by Craik to project and explore the restricted ambitions of women onto men. Mitchell, for instance, suggests that John Halifax 'may indeed be 'a woman in trousers', who raises 'traditional feminine traits to heroic stature', and Phineas Fletcher 'bridges the separate [gendered] spheres', Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik*, p.49: Showalter has argued that 'Fletcher and Halifax represent the two sides of [Craik's] self image', Showalter, 'Tactics of Sentiment', p. 18.
[68] Henry James, *Notes and Reviews* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1968), pp.167-168; quoted in Mitchell, *Dinah Mulock Craik*, p. 51.

> it is difficult to suppress a fear that Phineas Finn [sic] will fall hopelessly in love with John Halifax, so hard is it to remember that Phineas is of the male sex. Afterwards, when he professes to be an uncle, the reader is aware constantly that he is really an aunt, and a curious perplexity is apt to arise in the mind on the subject.[69]

Although Hutton only expressed a fear that the effeminate Phineas *might* fall in love with Halifax, that Phineas did so is clearly demonstrated from the outset of the novel. That Phineas also became what Peleg might consider to be Halifax's 'female bride', however, is perhaps more implicit in the frequent allusions of affinity between Phineas and Ursula, the woman who eventually becomes Halifax's wife. Likened to the young, impetuous Ursula, for example, Phineas was impulsive by nature and, by his own admission, 'felt at once quickly and keenly' for Halifax (JH, p. 26). In fact, when Abel Fletcher warns his son 'not to give way to violent passions', Phineas correctly understands this rebuke as having 'had reference' to Ursula, and, in particular, her impulsive act of defiant generosity to an impoverished juvenile Halifax (JH, p. 23).

More explicit, however, is Phineas's role as the guardian of Halifax's domestic bliss, a role he eventually comes to share with Ursula. Although Silvana Colella, drawing upon the work of Katherine Snyder, has suggested that as an 'invalid bachelor', the effeminate Phineas is a threshold figure who 'occupies a liminal position between the domestic sphere and the market', Phineas is, in fact, predominantly identified with a position that is more in keeping with some of the most influential ideas regarding the 'natural' role of women.[70] Sarah Ellis, for instance, had argued that women '[we]re by nature endowed with peculiar faculties' that included an 'acuteness of feeling' and sympathy for others.[71] As in all her didactic texts, Ellis makes it abundantly clear that it was a woman's duty to enact these uniquely female abilities in the 'distinct and separate sphere' of the home. Indeed, according to Ellis, the home was a woman's natural sphere 'of action […] where she may love, […] and *serve*', and one that she must safe guard from all the

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[69] R.H. Hutton, 'Novels by the Authoress of John Halifax', p. 258; quoted in Showalter, 'Tactics of Sentiment', p. 17.

[70] Silvana Colella**, '**Gifts and Interests: John Halifax, Gentleman and the Purity of Business' in *Victorian Literature and Culture,* Vol. 35 No. 2 (September 2007), pp. 397-415, p. 401.

[71] Ellis, *The Daughters of England*, p. 3.

external discord associated with the competitive masculine public realm.[72] Similarly, Craik's novel recreates this gendering of private and public spaces and, therefore, identities, through her depiction of Phineas's and Halifax's particular association with each. Prior to Halifax's marriage to Ursula March, for example, having set up a 'little *ménage*' in Endersley with Halifax, Phineas was keen to maintain his industrious friend's domestic comfort and ensure that Halifax return home to find 'a cheerful hearth' and, significantly, Phineas's own sympathetic presence (JH, pp. 99, 135; my emphasis). Despite the disruption to this exclusively male domesticity brought about by Halifax's marriage to Ursula, Phineas, is nevertheless, both assimilated into the Halifaxs' marital home and Ursula's role as wife and mother. After his father's death, Phineas not only devotedly shares with Ursula in the upbringing of Halifax's children but would also loyally sit and wait with her in the evening, as 'usual', anxious for Halifax to return from his own (public) 'sphere of usefulness' (JH, pp. 215, 302).

In keeping, however, with Peleg's claims regarding the basis of Jonathan's and David's heterosexual marriage, Phineas's own metaphorical marriage to Halifax might be seen to have been implicitly, and ironically, enacted in Abel Fletcher's offer to Halifax of a possible future 'partnership' in business with himself (JH, p. 84). As Peleg has argued, David's ascendancy to kingship is dependent upon the Biblical text's feminization of Jonathan. Similarly, Craik's novel repeats this process whereby Abel's business proposal signals that Phineas's effeminacy disqualifies him from eventually succeeding his father in the Fletcher business (JH, p. 24). Whilst earlier Abel had 'rejoiced' at the thought that an improvement in Phineas's health would ultimately lead to his son's involvement in the family business, Abel's 'one desire' is thwarted by his self-confessed 'feeble and womanish' son who '[m]entally and physically […] revolted from [his] father's trade' and had resolved that he should 'never' become 'assistant and successor' to his father (JH, pp. 24, 35, 24). Ultimately, in part recognition of Halifax's brave loyalty and useful services and part recognition of Phineas's deficient identification with the ideals of a masculine work ethic, Abel allows Halifax, 'in some measure to take [Phineas's] place' (JH, p. 84). Any suggestion, however, that Abel is metaphorically adopting Halifax is quickly refuted: 'May God deal with thee as thou dealest with my son – my only

[72] Ellis, *Daughters of England*, pp. 7, 11. My emphasis.

son!' (JH, p. 84). Although, in view of this declaration, Abel might be regarded as emphasising Phineas's masculinity, significantly, his comments reveal concerns regarding the implications of a proposal that compound Phineas's effeminacy. By transferring Phineas's future control of the Fletcher business to Halifax, Abel is acutely aware that he is ultimately entrusting Halifax with Phineas's future security and well-being. Given the extent of Phineas's feminization, therefore, the concerns that Abel expresses regarding his son's future dependence on Halifax suggest that Craik's depiction of Abel's business proposal is perhaps engaging with contemporary public interests and feminist political agitation regarding the legal status of married women's property as a means to define the bond between Phineas and Halifax.

Two years prior to the publication of Craik's novel, for instance, founding member of the Married Women's Property Committee, Barbara Leigh Smith, had set out an attack on the legal disabilities of married women in her pamphlet, *A Brief Summary, in Plain Language, of the Most Important Laws of England concerning Women; Together with a Few Observations Thereon.* Such was the 'considerable public attention and press comment' aroused by Leigh Smith's pamphlet, that a second edition was published in the same year that her committee petitioned parliament for reform and, notably, Craik's novel was published.[73] Central to and highlighted by the feminist arguments for married women's property reform were the hardships and grievances caused to women (of all classes) whose property and earnings were, upon marriage, appropriated and controlled by their husbands.

Given the similarity of Abel's concerns regarding the vulnerability to which he exposes his effeminate son by effectively placing Phineas's future financial security entirely at the disposal of Halifax, Abel's comments regarding 'his son' only serve to further undermine Phineas's masculinity. Indeed, Abel's concern, for all intents and purposes, highlights both the fact that Phineas is more akin to a daughter for whom responsibility is to be transferred from an anxious father to a prospective son-in-law, and the legal and financial dynamics of matrimony currently being debated. In so doing, Craik frames Phineas's and Halifax's relationship in its historical context of heterosexual marriage. Moreover, in acknowledging this responsibility, which accompanies his opportunity for future success, Halifax's

[73] Lee Holcombe, *Wives & Property: Reform of the Married Women's Property Law in Nineteenth-Century England* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1983), p. 58.

subsequent ‘vow’ further underscores the implicit matrimonial context of this scene (JH, p. 84).

Whilst this symbolically ‘heterosexual’ marriage of class difference, enacted through the homosocial bonding of a virtuously masculine Halifax and an effeminately invalided Phineas proves to be successful, George Eliot’s depiction of the conspicuously similar male dyad of Tom Tulliver and Philip Wakem, as Elaine Showalter has suggested, ultimately refutes this possibility. Unlike Craik’s invalid narrator, Phineas, for example, who idolised Halifax, the ‘glory of a young man’, Eliot’s effeminate invalid, Philip found himself ‘rather oppressed’ by the ‘strong presence’ of Stephen Guest (JH, p. 90, Mill, p. 413).

It is, however, through her depiction of the hyper-masculine Tom’s ambivalent responses to the close proximity of an effeminate Philip that Eliot might be seen to have taken issue with, and revised Craik’s optimistic portrait of a male homosociality’s potential for ameliorating class based personal prejudices. In particular, Eliot might be seen to have explored this potential in her depiction of Tom’s and Philip’s placement at King’s Lorton, an environment in which, prior to Philip’s arrival, Tom had found his sense of masculinity floundering. Ironically, Tom’s encounter with Philip, the son of a man Mr Tulliver regards as a ‘rascal’ and, therefore, Tom’s ‘natural enemy’, becomes an occasion not to reassert that masculine identity, but one that threatens to further undermine it (Mill, p. 144). Having been accustomed to, and enjoying an active outdoor life in which he could fulfil ‘an early desire for mastery over inferior animals […] and small sisters’, the domineering Tom Tulliver, finds himself increasingly feminized under the ‘vigorous’ tutelage of Mr Stelling at King’s Lorton (Mill, pp. 77, 122). Removed from the opportunity to physically enforce his dominance over fellow pupils as he had done in his previous school, and incapable of making any great progress in his studies, ‘Tom became more like a girl than he had ever been in his life’ (Mill, p. 122). Although the introduction of Philip Wakem to King’s Lorton is initially disappointing for Tom because he could ‘not pitch […] into him’, Philip’s presence was not completely unwelcome to Tom because he relished the opportunity to ‘quarrel’ with the son of his father’s social nemesis as well as exert, once again, his own sense of masculine mastery (Mill, pp. 138, 140). That is to say, ‘Tom thought he should rather like to show Philip that he had better not try his spiteful tricks on

him' (Mill, p. 140; Eliot's emphasis). Yet, in close proximity to Philip, Tom's responses to this 'pale [and] puny fellow' with hair 'like a girl's' became somewhat complicated (Mill, p. 140). Indeed, Eliot's depiction of Tom and Philip's relationship (albeit intermittently problematic) appears, initially, to endorse Craik's earlier optimistic vision of a male dyad of homosociality founded on unstable gender identity. However, whilst Craik's portrait of a male homosocial bond is presented in terms of a heterosexual friendship between a feminized Phineas and resolutely virtuous masculine Halifax, Eliot's portrayal of Tom's subsequent relationship with the effeminate Philip appears to reverse this process to suggest, initially at least, the success of male homosocial bonding is dependent upon the feminization of both parties of a male dyad. More specifically, Eliot's novel suggests that it is Tom's adherence to a vigorous hyper-competitive and prejudiced masculinity that must give way in order for him to establish anything like a meaningful friendship with Philip. In fact, it would appear that Tom's sense of his own faltering masculinity at King's Lorton, which preceded Philip's arrival, facilitated the later intermittent bouts of amity in which Tom reveals an almost homoerotic fascination for Philip. Whilst Tom had only ever before fleetingly glimpsed Philip at St Ogg's and had 'always turned away', despite the initial 'uncomfortable flutter' he felt on being introduced to Philip, Tom becomes 'furtive[ly]' attracted to him (Mill, pp. 139, 140). With Philip's deformity obscured from view, Tom found himself 'look[ing] oftener and longer at Philip's face' (Mill, p. 140). A face that was not only agreeable, but as Mr Tulliver had claimed, was like that of Philip's late mother.

Arguably, given Philip's feminine appearance and willingness to indulge Tom with his storytelling, as Maggie had done earlier, Tom's attraction to Philip might be regarded in terms of surrogate sibling affection. Yet Tom's 'blundering patronage' of Philip's limited mobility, which only provoked Philip's irritability, suggests a sensitivity hitherto unexpressed by Tom (Mill, p. 145). Whilst he could 'never thoroughly overc[o]me his repulsion to Philip's deformity', Tom found that 'it was impossible not to like Philip's company when he was in a good humour' (Mill, p. 144). Notwithstanding Tom's (struggling) regard for Philip, however, his prevailing tendency to exert, as well as display, dominance over Philip cannot be fully overcome. In a flawed attempt to reassert his masculine identity, in what might be seen as a symbolic phallic gesture which causes a rift between Mr Stelling's two

students, Tom badly cuts his foot with a sword. Although tormented by a 'terrible dread' that he may be rendered permanently lame, Tom is nevertheless unable to definitively confront this possibility and cannot bring himself to 'ask the question which might bring the fatal "yes"' (Mill, p. 157). Effectively, however, Tom's injury potentially threatens not only to disable him, but in the given context of Philip, also threatens Tom with his own permanent emasculation. Tom's reluctance, therefore, to ascertain the long term consequences of his injury are founded on a fear that the 'fatal' yes implicitly signals the death of his own masculine identity.

Despite, however, the animosity generated by Tom's admiration and disastrous emulation of Mr Poulter's military swordsmanship, his earlier, albeit clumsy, gestures of compassion to Philip do not go unreciprocated. Having had to live, and suffer the consequences of his deformity, itself the result of an accident, Philip's 'first thought', in a chapter entitled 'A Love Scene', is for Tom (Mill, p. 158).[74] Subsequently endeavouring to discover and disclose what is fortunate news, Philip hastened to inform him. Ostensibly, Tom's response is a combination of relief and appreciation. Significantly, however, the hostility which had previously interrupted Tom's gaze on Philip is quashed and Tom's scopophilic fascination for the effeminate Philip resumed. Paradoxically, the intervention of Philip, which reassures Tom of his masculinity, also reasserts Tom's homoerotic fascination for him. In a breathtaking moment of relief and 'sudden joy', Tom 'turned his blue-grey eyes straight on Philip's face, as he had not done for a fortnight or more' (Mill, p. 158).

Notwithstanding the fledgling promise of Tom and Philip's friendship, however, Eliot's novel, in stark contrast to Craik's *John Halifax,* suggests that the inherent masculine prejudices bound up in an awareness of class difference cannot be so easily surmounted through male homosocial bonds. In what might be regarded as an outright renunciation of Craik's depiction of an instantaneous and sustained intense bond of male friendship, Eliot's narrator suggests that '[i]f boys and men are to be welded together in the glow of transient feeling, they must be made of metal that will mix, else they inevitably fall asunder when the heat dies out' (Mill, p. 161). Although, ostensibly, this comment refers to the incompatible and 'jarring natures'

[74] Ostensibly, this chapter title refers to Maggie and Tom, but it does seem, however, to be relevant to this scene between Tom and Philip.

of Tom and Philip, notably, as Eliot's narrator also highlights, Tom's declining regard is superseded not by any innate or natural aversion to Philip, someone whom Tom, significantly, found at times 'was impossible not to like', but the renewal of existent prejudices (Mill, p. 144). Tom's attraction to and admiration for his fellow student is primarily disrupted by 'the *old* background of suspicion and dislike' generated by his father's hostility toward Lawyer Wakem (Mill, p. 161; my emphasis). In fact, it might be argued that it is Mr Tulliver's deep rooted sense of inferiority to those who had 'got the start' of him, personified most specifically in the 'long hated' figure of Lawyer Wakem, which forms the basis of Tom's 'mistaken education' (Mill, pp.13, 312, 148). It is perhaps of no little significance, therefore, that despite the renewal of Tom and Philip's friendship, Tom, in the presence of his father, declares he has no intention of continuing his friendship with Philip after leaving King's Lorton and refuses Maggie's entreaty to openly acknowledge his affection for Philip and to '[*s*]*ay*' that he 'love[d]' him (Mill, p. 161). Indeed, Tom's response is a triumphant declaration that he could beat Philip at his own game. That is to say, Tom boasted to his father that although Philip had 'taught [him] to play at draughts […] [he] could beat him' (Mill, p. 161).

Subsequently, despite both Tom and Philip demonstrating a capacity to develop an affectionate bond with one another, Tom's relationship with 'Wakem's son' is ultimately structured by Mr Tulliver's prejudice towards Philip's father (Mill, p. 144). Whilst Tom's revived aversion and mistrust is, in part, an expression of his own bigotry regarding Philip's deformity, fundamentally Tom's renewed dislike for Philip is the belief that Philip was 'the son of a rogue' (Mill, p. 161). The embryonic bond of friendship established between Tom and Philip is therefore portrayed by Eliot as being incapable of withstanding the influence of Mr Tulliver's hostility. Thus, Eliot's novel, as Elaine Showalter has claimed, might be seen to 'repudiate Craik's sentimental portraits' of Phineas's friendship with Halifax in that Phineas, unlike Tom Tulliver, whilst struggling with a loyalty to his initially prejudiced father, had nevertheless determinedly pursued a friendship with Halifax which is shown to eliminate the hostile masculine tensions of class difference.[75]

[75] Showalter, 'Tactics of Sentiment', p. 18.

Homoerotic surveillance and the female gaze in Craik's *Olive*

Benign and intense homosocial bonding is also central to Craik's earlier novel, *Olive*. As Dennis Denisoff has noted, 'the most harmonious images' in Craik's novel are those of 'women's mutual reliance'.[76] However, although Denisoff correctly suggests that Craik's 'text depicts a strong admiration for female-centred relations', her novel also suggests that these same-sex bonds are both an effective and necessary means of reducing the hazards associated with female sexuality.[77] In fact, overall, Craik's novel specifically explores the apparently self-destructive consequences of unrestrained heterosexual female desire, not least perhaps through its portrayal of Olive's impulsive 'baby-bride' and 'baby-mother', Sybilla.[78] Given its historical context, however, Craik's novel can be seen both to engage with and anticipate a variety of existent and emergent discourses that expressed growing concerns regarding deviant femininity. Lynda Nead, for instance, has identified a correlation between fears generated by parliamentary debates regarding reform of the legal status of married women (not least a greater access to petition for divorce) and the 'explosion of [pictorial] representations of the adulteress in the middle years of the 1850s'.[79] That the spectre of this dangerous figure emerged in these political debates is perhaps not surprising given that it was the 'notorious' Caroline Norton who, in part, had been a source of inspiration to the campaign for marriage reform and who, as Lee Holcombe has suggested, 'flashed [once] again before the public eye'.[80] Although Norton had been unsuccessfully sued for divorce on the grounds of her alleged adultery with then prime minister, Lord Melbourne, her reputation had nevertheless been tarnished by the scandal of her trial in 1836 which had been 'the sensation of the day'.[81]

Notably, Craik's early depiction of Olive's young mother, Sybilla, appears to draw upon, and presuppose popular interest and fear surrounding the dangerously disruptive presence of the adulteress. Sybilla's husband, Angus, for example,

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[76] Dennis Denisoff, *Sexual Visualty from Literature to Film, 1850 – 1950* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 46.
[77] Denisoff, *Sexual Visuality*, p. 47.
[78] Dinah Mulock Craik, *Olive* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.9. All further references will be given in the body of the text following the initial 'O'.
[79] Lynda Nead, *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain*, (Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1988), p. 71.
[80] Holcombe, *Wives & Property*, p. 50.
[81] Holcombe, *Wives & Property*, p. 52.

returning home unexpectedly after four years abroad, is more than a little 'bewildered' at finding her 'whirling madly' in the arms of an 'old acquaintance' (O, pp. 21, 20). Despite assurances to the contrary, 'the impression is given', and Angus's (unfounded) suspicions, having been aroused, continue, in part, to determine the collapse of their marriage. As Craik's narrator explains, 'the deed was done' and '[w]hile he lived, Captain Rothesay never forgot that night' (O, p. 22).

Even Craik's portrait of her hyper-virtuous heroine, Olive, is not immune from an implicit association with the figure of another 'fallen' woman: the prostitute. Although some critics have chosen to emphasise the level of 'freedom' that Olive experiences as a result of her exclusion from marriage, little attention has been given to the implications of Olive's 'isolated' and defeminised place in the public sphere (O, p. 127). Denisoff, for instance, has suggested that Olive's 'visible difference functions as a liberating catalyst' which 'sanctions' an artistic career that would otherwise have been undermined by an adherence to predominant heteronormative ideology.[82] Similarly, Martha Stoddard Holmes has suggested that despite the 'anguish and exclusion' evident in Craik's depictions of the 'disabled woman's involvement in the marriage plot', Craik, nevertheless, also offers in such narratives a 'much more optimistic placement of disabled women in culture'.[83] According to Stoddard Holmes, Craik, through her depiction of Olive's success as a painter and the financial supporter of her ailing and widowed mother, demonstrates the possible 'benefits' to women like Olive Rothesay who are (presumably) excluded 'from a woman's natural destiny'.[84] Both critics, however, overlook how Craik's portrait of her heroine's pursuit of financial independence and unrestricted and 'unguarded' mobility is haunted by an allusion to a profession far less respectable than that of painter (O, p. 127). Although Olive is indeed liberated by her visible difference from 'other girls', paradoxically, the particular freedoms that she enjoys are dangerously open to misinterpretation; something that her mother seems only too aware of (O, p. 127). Whilst Olive might have celebrated the fact that she '*must* mingle' amongst the exclusive company of men, Sybilla is rather less comfortable with Olive's independence (O, p. 127; my emphasis). In fact, Sybilla

[82] Denisoff, *Sexual Visuality*, p. 47.
[83] Martha Stoddard Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction: Physical Disability in Victorian Culture* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2004), p. 48.
[84] Stoddard Holmes, *Fictions of Afflictions*, p. 50; Craik, *Olive*, p. 127, quoted in Stoddard Holmes, p. 51.

'trembled and murmured' not only at Olive's 'solitary days at the British Museum', but more significantly Sybilla's concerns were also prompted by Olive's 'long lonely walks, sometimes in wintertime extending far into the dusk of evening' (O, p. 127). Despite Olive's attempts to reassure her mother by declaring she is beyond heterosexual 'notice', the liberties that she exercises, and which are brought about by that apparent invisibility, are, nevertheless, in keeping with the actions necessarily exercised by the prostitute (O, p. 127).

Whilst the aforementioned deviant femininities that shadow some of the portraits of Olive and her mother are integral to the overall context of Craik's novel, it is the specific preoccupation with the dangers of emergent female sexuality that forms the basis of its over-riding theme. That female adolescence was of particular and prevailing concern for Craik is evidenced in her article, 'In Her Teens', written for *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1864. Dismissing the romantic poetic conceptions of adolescence as 'that charming time', Craik argues instead that:

> the years between twelve and twenty are, to most, a season anything but pleasant; a crisis in which the whole heart and brain are full of tumult […] delirious with exquisite unrealities, - and agonized with griefs equally chimerical and unnatural […] Does it not behove us […] to look a little more closely at our "girls"?[85]

Although published fourteen years after her novel, Craik's urgent appeal nonetheless resonated with similar anxieties that were contemporary with her second novel. As Anne Digby has noted, for example, some mid nineteenth-century doctors regarded female adolescence as a period when 'nymphomania was most often experienced'.[86] Whilst somewhat less extreme than Davis, more widespread opinions, nevertheless, also considered female sexual maturation to be a period of particular vulnerability. In 1852 Edward Tilt suggested that female adolescence and young womanhood was a period in a woman's lifecycle that was acutely susceptible to the 'corruptions […] of the age' and advocated that both novels and newspapers 'should be carefully kept from the young unmarried woman' for fear that they should be led 'to act […] what

[85] Dinah Mulock Craik, 'In Her Teens', *Macmillan's Magazine*, 10 (1864), pp. 219-223, p. 220, republished in Craik, *The Unkind Word*, pp. 293-294.
[86] Anne Digby, 'Women's Biological Straightjacket' in Susan Mendus and Jane Rendall, *Sexuality and Subordination*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 199.

they read'.[87] Over a decade later, Craik, in her *Macmillan's* article, continued to reiterate Tilt's concerns by arguing that 'every influence caught and every impression given during these years, is a matter of most vital moment.'[88]

A problematic and exacerbating factor for parents and guardians, however, as Patricia Branca has highlighted, was the fact that having sexually matured at the comparatively earlier age of fourteen, Victorian middle-class women did not usually marry until around twenty five and that 'for about ten years they were forced to sublimate [their] natural sexual drives'.[89] Consequently, the adolescent girl and unmarried young woman became the particular object of anxious observation and restriction. In 1843, for instance, presupposing Craik's entreaty 'to look a little more closely at our "girls"', Sarah Ellis had suggested that a mother's attention to her daughters 'ought not to be too much confined to their early years'.[90] In particular, Ellis proposed that a change from the bond of maternal affection to something 'more of the character of friendship' offered an effective means of 'watching every look, and hearing every word' of their adolescent daughters.[91] Significantly, Ellis's comments highlight a belief that female homosociality advantageously provided the 'opportunity of observing' young women on the threshold of sexual maturity, not least when in the company of men.[92]

In the following discussion it is argued that Craik's novel, *Olive*, also explored the potential opportunities of women's same-sex bonds to safe guard against the perceived hazards of emergent female sexuality. In particular, this discussion draws upon Beth Newman's psychoanalytical and historicist study of the scopophilic dynamics of Victorian femininity to develop further some of the compelling arguments forwarded in Sharon Marcus's study of middle-class Victorian women's same-sex bonding. It seeks to highlight how Craik, in *Olive*, expressed her own prevailing concerns regarding the dangers of emergent female sexual desire, and illustrated a belief in the (not unproblematic) *utility* of female

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[87] Edward J. Tilt, *Elements of Health and Principles of Female Hygiene* (1852), pp. 219-221 in Pat Jalland and John Hooper, *Women from Birth to Death* (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1986), p. 80.
[88] Craik, 'In Her Teens', in *The Unkind Word*, p. 294.
[89] Patricia Branca, *Silent Sisterhood: Middle-Class Women in the Victorian Home* (London: Croom Helm, 1975), p. 126.
[90] Ellis, *The Mothers of England*, p. 348.
[91] Ellis, *The Mothers of England*, pp. 348-349.
[92] Ellis, *The Mothers of England*, p.349.

homoerotics to combat those dangers. Craik's novel depicts Victorian homoerotic femininity as a necessary cultural tool to contain adolescent female sexuality whilst simultaneously revealing some of its potentially dangerous implications. More specifically, this section argues that the Victorian endorsement of a proliferation of female objectification of women, identified in Marcus's study, was represented by Craik as a potential means by which women could police each other through a socially sanctioned homoerotic gaze. However, although female homoerotic objectification serves to work, for Craik at least, like Foucault's identification of a panoptic model of social surveillance, her novel also highlights the inherent dangers of a homoerotic discourse that strongly emphasises female display for the objectifying gaze of other women who fail to look that little bit 'more closely'. For Craik, the dichotomies of such a discourse become particularly relevant during the onset of female adolescence; a period, by her own understanding, in need of a homoerotic outlet, but one that cannot be allowed to be disrupted prematurely by heterosexual desire or, itself, to be disruptive of the future success of the Victorian middle-class heterosexual economy.

In particular, both in her novel and more explicitly in her later didactic text, *A Woman's Thoughts About Women*, Craik promoted the idea of strong passionate bonds between young (adolescent) women as a transitory space for the safe expression of emergent sexual or erotic desire. This also, she suggested, simultaneously provided an initial basis for the future success of their later homosocial and heterosexual bonds. In effect, Craik claims that these 'delicious' and 'passionate' 'girlish friendships' bound up in dynamic homoerotic states of jealousy, euphoria and absolute misery were instrumental in the maturation process of young (single) middle-class womanhood.[93] This offered an effective rehearsal for later more subdued bonds, in which the illusion of 'elected' affection presupposed women's later elective opportunity in heterosexual marriage.[94] Thus, for Craik, these '"sentimental friendship[s]"' are 'a foreshadowing of love […] in its highest form'.[95] Love, in its highest form is, however, for Craik, a deeper far more stable homosocial or heterosexual affection that arises (or can only arise) when a young woman's passionate impulses have been tempered through what she suggests are 'fleeting'

[93] Craik, *A Woman's Thoughts*, p. 168.
[94] Craik, *A Woman's Thoughts*, p. 175.
[95] Craik, *A Woman's Thoughts*, pp. 169, 168.

homoerotic infatuations.[96] Important as they are, however - and Craik is at pains to emphasise that they should be neither 'mock[ed]' nor 'taken lightly',[97] passionate '"sentimental" friendship[s]' between women 'must die' because if they continue unabated and unchecked they not only become 'repugnant to common sense' but 'actually wrong'.[98] They '*must*' either cede to, or 'melt away' in favour of heterosexual love, or become restructured into the 'true shape' of less fervent but no less affectionate homosocial friendships.[99] However, whilst the 'true shape' of homosocial female friendship is, according to Craik, something of a rarity to be treasured, of supreme priority is the culturally sanctioned heterosexual bond of marriage that subsequently develops from its apparent homoerotic rehearsal.[100] 'After marriage', Craik declares, 'for either party to have or to desire a dearer or closer friend than the other, is a state of things so inconceivably deplorable […] that it will not bear discussion'.[101] Underlying Craik's conservative and didactic celebration of female homoerotics, and her call to 'take heed' of their importance, is an implicit suggestion that they are an effective (although not exclusive) means to contain, without suppressing, emergent female sexual desire, whilst nurturing its potential in the interests of a successful heterosexual imperative.[102]

Ostensibly, Craik's arguments regarding the significance of intense and strong bonds between women (and the benefit thereof to the middle-class Victorian ideal of marriage) would seem to provide strong evidence to support Sharon Marcus's depiction of female homosocial and homoerotic bonds as constituting an important part of mainstream Victorian femininity. Moreover, Craik, in acknowledging the homoerotic dynamics inherent in these 'elective' bonds, seems to provide further evidence to support Marcus's argument that there existed 'a yield built *into* the [gender] system' that, whilst limiting women's heterosexual autonomy, 'offered flexibility, if not utter freedom […] through female friendships' and allowing them to 'engage in behaviour commonly seen as the monopoly of men: competition [for other women], active choice, [and] appreciation of beauty' (BW,

[96] Craik, *A Woman's Thoughts*, p. 168.
[97] Craik, *A Woman's Thoughts*, p. 169. Craik emphasises this point both in her didactic *Woman's Thoughts* and eight years earlier in her abrupt narrative explanation of the significance of Olive's strong attraction to Sara Derwent.
[98] Craik, *A Woman's Thoughts*, p. 174.
[99] Craik, *A Woman's Thoughts*, p. 169. My emphasis.
[100] Craik, *A Woman's Thoughts*, p. 170.
[101] Craik, *A Woman's Thoughts*, p. 176.
[102] Craik, *A Woman's Thoughts*, p. 168.

pp. 27, 26; Marcus's emphasis). Indeed Marcus provides extensive evidence of the proliferation of homoerotic fascination recorded in the letters, journals, and diaries of hundreds of middle-class Victorian women. Not only does this life-writing testify to how women enjoyed competing with one another for the attentions of female friends, and 'boast[ing]' of their successful 'conquests', but it also reveals how women 'compulsively' documented the appearance of every woman they encountered, regardless of whether they were acquainted with them or not (BW, p. 59). According to Marcus, Lady Monkswell was 'typical' of other women in her enthusiasm to register her delight in looking at beautiful women, and whose beauty was sufficient in itself to provide a basis for affection (despite possible reservations regarding personality traits) (BW, p. 60).

However, whilst Marcus's claims for the widespread participation in female homoeroticism, centred around a seemingly insatiable appetite for the pleasures of looking at, competing for, and generally relishing the society of beautiful women, at no point does she pause to consider how this widespread homoeroticism may have impacted on those women not considered to be physically worthy of such fascination. In fact, Marcus presents us with an historical portrait of women who, like Craik's fictional Sybilla Rothesay, appear to have 'learned since [their] birth to consider beauty as the greatest good' (O, p. 14). What implications there might have been for women like Craik's deformed heroine, Olive, subject to the imposition of a 'distinction' between themselves and other women who were looked upon 'with admiring eyes', is something Marcus's study does not engage with and we need to consider whether the discourse of female homoeroticism accommodated *all* women regardless of their beauty (O, p. 215).

There is one glimpse in Marcus's research which suggests that the available cultural practices of female homoeroticism 'built into' the discourse of mainstream femininity were by no means universally accessible. However, Marcus does not address this directly. More specifically, Marcus includes in her study an extract from the 1838 diary of Caroline Clive (then thirty-seven years old and just recently married) 'reflect[ing]' not only the distress she felt at her unreciprocated attempts to establish another of her 'most violent friendships' with the novelist Catherine Gore, but also her own explanation as to why her friendship remained unrequited:

> When I was so many years younger I used to fall into the most violent friendships and the one I felt for her was nearly the strongest of my passions. Of course she did not return it to an ugly, half-taught, unintelligible girl like me, and I remember crying for half a night because she went out of London without bidding me farewell.[103]

Notwithstanding her self-deprecation, and the implicit significance of age and status difference between her and Gore, it would seem that for Caroline Clive at least, being unattractive and somewhat unsophisticated was sufficient grounds to justify Gore's rejection of her. So internalised and unquestioned is this belief that it appears to be something of a matter '[o]f course' for Clive. Yet rather than acting as a deterrent, Gore's rejection of Clive seems to have intensified and sustained her unfulfilled desire to establish a passionate attachment. Implicit in Clive's comments is the suggestion that her yearning for Gore seems to have been strengthened by its very failure to achieve reciprocation. Such comments would indeed support Marcus's argument that with the exception of Christian biographies, life-writing 'appealed to the glamour of the unattainable' (BW, p. 37). However, the extent to which this same-sex female agency and autonomy, which Marcus suggests was 'built into' gender discourse, helped facilitate the expected heterosexual conduct by middle-class women is not clearly explained by Marcus. Although she is absolutely explicit in her argument that during the period of 1830 to 1880 there existed no concerns or anxieties regarding female homosociabilty and homoeroticism she is less clear as to what extent compliance with the Victorian discourse of middle-class femininity was unavoidably obligatory. Whilst she claims that 'Victorian society's investment in heterosexuality went hand-in hand with what *we could* call compulsory homosociability and homoeroticism for women' and that the 'imperative to please men [that] required women to scrutinize other women […] promoted a specifically feminine appetite for attractive friends and lovely strangers', her comments are somewhat ambiguous (BW, pp. 61-62). That is to say, Marcus's comments suggest that this form of female homoeroticism was rather less of an autonomous expression of female same-sex desire and that, essentially, in the interests of heterosexuality, middle-class Victorian women had little choice but to 'scrutinize' other women.

[103] Caroline Clive quoted in Marcus, *Between Women*, p. 56.

However, reading Marcus's study of Caroline Clive's diary entries (1838 and 1845) in the context of Craik's novel and Craik's own *Thoughts About Women*, previously discussed, it might be possible to suggest that the appropriateness of female homoeroticism was, for some Victorians, specifically associated with young adolescent women. This is a claim, however, that Marcus clearly refutes:

> In an era that saw no contest between what we now call heterosexual and homosexual desire, neither men nor women saw anything disruptive about amorous badinage between women, and therefore no effort was made to contain and denigrate female homoeroticism as an immature stage to be overcome. Only in the late 1930s, after fear of female inverts had become widespread, did women's lifewritings start to describe female friendship as a developmental phase to be effaced by marriage. Since then, erotic playfulness between women had either been over-interpreted as having the same seriousness as sexual acts or under-interpreted and trivialized as a phase significant only as training for heterosexual courtship (BW, p. 58).

Marcus suggests that the evidence to counter any similar claims for the Victorian era exists in the fact that the 'expressions of playful attraction and love' between women continued to be 'as common after' their marriages as they were before and as such cannot merely be viewed as a preparation for it (BW, p. 58). The accounts given in Caroline Clive's diaries, provided by Marcus, however, might suggest otherwise. In 1845, seven years after her marriage, Clive, does indeed record, like the aforementioned Lady Monkswell, the delight and 'pleasure she took in [an]other wom[a]n's beauty' (BW, p. 60). Writing about an encounter with the poet Caroline Norton, Clive notes her 'perfect beauty', her 'eyes with long eye-lashes […] the lower touching her cheek […] lovely skin and shape' (BW, p. 60). This is, however, somewhat of a less 'violent' expression of homoerotic passion that had formed part of her girlhood experiences and it would seem that, concurring with Craik, Clive consigns such volatile expressions of homoerotic desire to a period of pre-pubescence or adolescence. The ardent attraction she felt for other women is associated with a distant time. It was how she '*used*' to respond to other young women. Her subsequent attraction to beautiful women after seven years of marriage seems to have become far more moderate and would appear to comply with Craik's dictates that whilst such volatile attachments form part of a maturation process in the

development of female sexuality, they should, nevertheless, soften in their nature with age.

In her novel, however, Craik seems to underscore the vital long term importance of these passionate bonds by highlighting the disasters that await passionate young women who negate homoerotic bonds in favour of hastily establishing heterosexual relationships. In fact, Craik's novel is replete with young women who rush into imprudent and, ultimately unhappy and occasionally fatal marriages. Having introduced her readers to Olive's beautiful 'child bride' mother, Sybilla, and catalogued the gradual collapse of her impetuous marriage, Craik's novel maintains its focus on the dangerous potential of an adolescent development unmediated by homoerotic bonds by presenting a continuous series of portraits of seemingly uncontrollably passionate young women. In addition to Alison Balfour, who wrecked her life by tempestuously marrying in anger, and the Bertha Rochester-like figure of Angus Rothesay's mistress, Celia Manners, the reader is also offered a depiction of the next generation of female adolescents in the forms of Olive and her fair-weather friend, Sara Derwent, before depicting a still younger female adolescent in the guise of the suicidal Christal Manners. Of all the women in Craik's novel it is only Olive, her deformed heroine, who finally secures heterosexual happiness. Martha Stoddard Holmes has argued that this is because in Craik's novel the function of 'expressing excess emotion' has been turned 'away from a disabled woman to a nondisabled one'. [104] Yet Olive is no less passionate than the other young women in the novel. Having fallen in love with Harold Gwynne, for example, a love she mistakenly believes to be unrequited, Olive experiences a morbidly erotic dream about him in which:

> he took her in his arms, clasping her close as a lover his betrothed; and in so doing pressed a bright steel into her heart. Yet it was such a sweet death, given lovingly amidst kisses and passionate tears, that, waking, she would fain have wished it true (O, p. 254).

Ostensibly Craik's depiction of this dream symbolises for Olive the death of her hopes. Olive's reference, however, to a 'sweet death', which is an allusion to the French euphemism of orgasm, nevertheless expresses Olive's wish to have a

[104] Stoddard Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*, p. 72.

sexually fulfilling (rather than platonic) relationship with Harold. Craik seems to be deliberately sanctifying that wish by ensuring Olive's place in Harold's passionate dream embrace is that of his 'betrothed'.

Yet whilst Craik implies that her heroine has no less of a dangerously passionate potential than the other young women in the novel, notwithstanding the notable exception of her relationship with Christal Manners, Olive nevertheless remains committed to establishing, first and foremost, strong bonds with other women; something that Stoddard Holmes mistakenly suggests is absent from this novel. In her comparison of Charlotte Yonge's *The Clever Woman of the Family* and Craik's *Olive,* for example, Holmes argues that in Yonge's novel 'the erasure of emotional excess permits the homosocial to an extent' that Craik's does not: 'Olive's friendship is basically severed by Sara's marriage, and Sara's death is precisely what makes space for Olive's validation in the marriage plot'.[105] Whilst it is true that Olive's fledgling 'romantic friendship' with Sara is terminated by Sara's departure (and subsequent marriage), Craik's illustration of the asymmetrical nature of this bond implies that Olive's love for Sara would never really be fully reciprocated. Although Sara claims, when prompted, that she cared for Olive '[a] great deal' she qualifies this declaration by revealing that Olive's friendship has no particular or special place amongst any of her other friendships (O, p. 71). Sara cares for Olive 'as much as ever [she] can, seeing [she] ha[d] so many people to care for' (O, p. 71). Sara's regard for Olive is no more than that which she has for others. Admittedly she 'tri[ed] to laugh away [her] tears', when bidding Olive farewell, but these tears are, in part, an expression of her pity and guilt; she 'regret[ted]' her earlier, insensitive comments to Olive about her deformity but her tears, it would seem, were more than likely an expression of her 'sympathy' (O, pp. 70-71).

However, despite having first been disappointed in her 'wild passion' for Sara, Olive subsequently establishes an alternative homoerotic bond with her own ailing mother Sybilla (O, p. 91). After initially adopting the role of carer to the invalided Sybilla, Olive's relationship with her mother is completely transformed. Not only does Olive become a 'mother unto [her] mother' but also found that 'time had blended' their affection 'into an almost sisterly bond' of 'intense love' (O, pp. 106, 109). Of ultimate significance, however, is that through the shifting aspects of

[105] Stoddard Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*, p. 55.

her relationship with her mother, Olive eventually finds the emotional space denied to her by Sara in which she can direct her passionate impulses. Her love for her mother became 'less of a sentiment than a passion', a 'wild devotion' (O, p. 128).

It would appear that in Craik's novel, rather than having to be 'erased' to make way for the triumph of marriage, passionate and strong female bonding is in fact essential to securing its development. Nevertheless, whilst Craik's novel highlights the importance of homoerotic female bonding to successful heterosexual marriage, it also illustrates how these culturally sanctioned bonds have a utilitarian function and operate as a necessary means to channel, rather than suppress young women's sexual impulses, as well as circumvent what is presented as disastrous premature heterosexuality.

Craik's novel, however, also calls upon other aspects of Victorian homoerotic femininity to assist in the management of female desire. Namely, *Olive* draws upon the power of the female gaze; something that Marcus argues was explicitly enacted through the medium of consumer culture. More specifically, in her innovative reading of fashion plates, Marcus has argued that Victorian fashion iconography was itself a particularly potent expression of Victorian homoerotic femininity.[106] Refuting persistent claims 'that only male viewers enjoy corporeal spectacles of femininity', Marcus suggests that by the very nature of images 'that put women [and] their bodies […] on display' for other women, fashion plates inevitably 'solicited a female gaze' (BW, p. 119). Moreover, Marcus claims that the conventions of the content of these images 'intensified' the homoerotic context in which the beholder of the image was placed. By depicting, more often than not, two women, with one looking at another who does not return the gaze, the content, according to Marcus, replicates the subject position of the beholder of the image which, she suggests, 'creates an erotic atmosphere redolent of voyeurism' (BW, p. 131). Like the onlooker in the image, the beholder of the fashion plate remains unobserved by the women upon whom she gazes. Additionally, in plates that included 'optical apparatus', or accessories, this homoerotic intensification of the female gaze was further compounded. According to Marcus, however, fashion plates not only promoted a desire for women to look at other women but also offered them

[106] Marcus suggests that both women's 'fashion magazines *and* [girls'] doll literature portrayed rituals replete with the [female] voyeurism, objectification, and domination that have been mistakenly declared the sole property of heterosexual men', p. 116. My emphasis.

the opportunity to enjoy 'being looked at by them' (BW, p. 117). That this change from being a voyeuristic subject to object of display was unproblematic in mixed company is explained by Marcus by the suggestion that Victorian middle-class masculine conduct 'directed men to admire women's bodies while deriding the fashions that clothed them' (BW, p. 117). Yet, as Marcus herself implies, many Victorian mothers and young women were unavoidably implicated in soliciting a male gaze by means of those very fashions. Having 'consulted fashion magazines to dress themselves and their daughters in the latest modes', many Victorian mothers, in their attempt to promote their daughters' marriage prospects would, according to Marcus, eagerly dress them in clothes that deliberately drew attention to their bodies: 'To help them marry men, mothers willingly draped daughters in clothes that exposed or accentuated breasts, waists, and hips' (BW, p. 117).

As revelatory, therefore, as Marcus's argument is, it nevertheless stops short of fully exploring the basis upon which female homoerotic voyeurism and objectification might have been instigated. Admittedly, Marcus concedes that a dominant heterosexual economy mediated an implicit sense of competition amongst women, and that '[t]he imperative to please men required women to *scrutinize* other women's dress and appearance in order to improve their own' (BW, pp. 61-62). Yet this raises questions regarding the extent to which the homoerotic gaze, like female amity in general, fundamentally functioned as the means to fulfil the imperatives of that heterosexuality. This is certainly not to deny Marcus's claims that Victorian women found pleasure or delight in objectifying one another, but rather to suggest that some consideration should be given to the degree to which the 'utter freedom' of female objectification of women was entirely *homo*-erotic. It would, therefore, seem relevant to ask: to what extent did a conscious or subconscious awareness of a dominant heterosexual culture intervene in this homoerotic voyeurism? It would, therefore, seem relevant to ask: to what extent did a conscious or subconscious awareness of a dominant heterosexual culture intervene in this homoerotic voyeurism? In order to address this question it is perhaps useful to draw upon Laura Mulvey's important psychoanalytical account of the relationship between the erotic spectacle of femininity in cinematic fantasy and its female audience.

In an initial analysis Mulvey argued that mainstream Hollywood cinema replicates the dynamics of a society structured around hierarchical sexual difference.

As part of a patriarchal society, where women are the 'bearer[s]', rather than the 'maker[s]' of 'meaning', Hollywood cinema, Mulvey claims, reproduces images of women that 'signif[y] male desire'.[107] The 'pleasure' therefore, 'in looking', according to Mulvey, separates an 'active/male' gaze from 'passive/female' display.[108] In effect, Mulvey suggests that this exclusive male gaze 'projects its fantasy' onto a passive female figure who is specifically 'coded' as the spectacle of erotic display.[109] In a subsequent revision, however, Mulvey suggested that regardless of gender, the spectator in the audience is subject to the unavoidable imposition of a masculine point of view; a process she calls 'masculinisation'. Drawing upon the Freudian concept of Oedipal nostalgia, Mulvey suggests that some women will enjoy this process of 'masculinisation', or identification with the active male gaze because it presents the opportunity to remember an earlier, suppressed stage of their psychological development. More specifically, Mulvey argues that a young girl's femininity arises from a *previous* 'parallel [masculine] development between the sexes' which, for the young girl, has subsequently been subject to repression by a patriarchal culture.[110] '[S]tructured around masculine pleasure', mainstream contemporary cinema therefore offers the female spectator the liberating possibility to 'rediscover' her pre-Oedipal, masculine identity.[111] Although not all female spectators respond in this way and, as such, find themselves 'so out of key with the pleasure on offer […] the spell of fascination is broken', significantly, Mulvey's study, nevertheless, highlights the manner in which women living in a patriarchal society necessarily become very adept at re-orientating their gendered perspective to a 'regressive 'masculinity'.[112] In fact, Mulvey argues that this 'trans-sex identification is a *habit* which very easily becomes *second nature'* to women.[113]

The historical and cultural distance between the visual discourse of nineteenth-century fashion iconography and twentieth-century cinema is, of course, significantly extensive; and it is certainly necessary to acknowledge here that the

[107] Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), pp. 15, 19.
[108] Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure', p. 19.
[109] Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure', p. 19.
[110] Mulvey, 'Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946)' in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, p. 32.
[111] Mulvey, 'Afterthoughts', p. 34.
[112] Mulvey, 'Afterthoughts', pp. 31, 37.
[113] Mulvey, 'Afterthoughts', pp. 31, 35. Mulvey's emphasis.

fictional representations of erotic femininity in mainstream cinema were specifically informed by and articulated from within a historical environment in which female roles and identities were markedly different to those of the Victorian era. The patriarchal society that shaped Hollywood representations of femininity, and which informs Mulvey's reading thereof, is not one that readily applies to the Victorian era. However, given that the fashion plate might be considered as having similarly constructed desirable femininity in a cultural context of conventional heteronormativity, Mulvey's arguments regarding the vacillating gendered perspective of female audiences nevertheless provide a useful theoretical framework with which to consider the Victorian woman's engagement with fashion iconography. Evidence for a variation of Mulvey's trans-sex perspective, for example, might be noted in a mother's endeavours to attract a potential suitor in marriage for their daughters. The look which a mother cast upon her daughter would inevitably be one that attempted an identification with the (male) gaze she wished to solicit for her daughter. Similarly, notwithstanding their 'appetite for attractive friends and lovely strangers', the scrutiny which women would subject each other to in order to increase their own erotic status and 'to please men' also suggests a shift in gender perspective and an identification with male heterosexual desire (BW, pp. 61-62).

Craik, however, in her novel, delineates a more explicit account of how a disruptive intervention of a masculine 'point-of-view' emerges through the female homoerotic gaze. As Martha Stoddard Holmes has noted, it was at Sara Derwent's birthday celebration (Olive's first orthodox 'private ball') that Olive 'grasp[ed] in the company of other young women the cultural name and place she ha[d] been assigned' (O, p. 63).[114] Although Sara is complicit in Sybilla's endeavour to tentatively introduce Olive into middle-class 'society', Olive finds herself negated by the beautiful friend who is presented as 'sweeping across the room in all the blaze of her remarkable loveliness', and was also intimidated by Sara's fellow friends, the 'haughty boarding-school belles' (O, p. 63). When Sara eventually 'consented' to dance with the ostracized Olive it was as an act of 'sacrifice to friendship' conducted with 'a slight shadow on her face' (O, p. 65). Craik's novel makes clear, however, that Sara's discomfort is not founded on her own self-esteem,

[114] Stoddard Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*, p. 49.

but the esteem of others, and fundamentally, that of men. Indeed Sara refutes a friend's claim that she deliberately chose to dance with Olive as an exploitative means to exhibit and emphasise her own beauty:

> I quite smiled to see you [Sara] dancing with that little Olive Rothesay, Miss Derwent [….] But I suppose you wanted to *show* the contrast between you.
> Nay, that's ill-natured, […]. She is a sweet little creature, and my very particular friend (O, p. 66).

Notwithstanding her later comment, which denies this especial fondness, Sara is compelled by Olive to explain why she and her friend, Jane, thought 'that nobody would fall in love with her! [Olive]' (O, p. 66). Ominously, Sara's remarks echo those Olive had overheard her father make (discussed below). In reiterating Angus Rothesay's comment, Sara awakens and instigates in Olive the beginnings of a full and anguished understanding as to the meaning of these suggestions: 'a thought – long subdued – began to dawn painfully in her mind' (O, p. 66). It is at this point that *both* Sara and Olive 'instinctively […] glanced to the mirror, where their two reflections stood' (O, p. 66). Whilst Olive had never been truly (self-)conscious in relation to her own 'slight deformity' which, we are told, 'was becoming less perceptible' even to the point that she might 'outgrow it in time', she was, nevertheless, conscious of the wide disparity between her own 'plain, and […] awkward' appearance and Sara's 'remarkable loveliness' (O, pp. 63, 66, 64). Indeed, Olive, whilst dancing with Sara, was captivated by her friend's 'graceful, floating' reflection in the mirror (O, p. 65). However, through Sara, Craik makes clear that Olive has failed to see women in the same way as they see her or, more importantly, themselves. It is Sara who provides a complete explanation, which is depicted as something of a devastating revelation for Olive. Whilst Sara dismissed the notion that Olive's 'defect[ive]' appearance had any significance or bearing on her own affection for Olive, she nevertheless explains to her that it might have particular relevance for 'strangers [and] *especially* […] men, who think so much about beauty' (O, p. 67; my emphasis). Significantly, after subsequently 'look[ing] resolutely at her own shape imaged in the glass', Olive declares: 'I see, as I never saw before – so little had I thought of myself' (O, p. 67). Ostensibly, Olive is forcibly confronted with her own deformity. More importantly, however, through Sara's earlier

discomfort of literally being on public display with Olive, and her subsequent explanation, Olive has been compelled to acknowledge how a mediating heterosexual gaze is potentially refracted through female homoerotic objectification, which determines Sara's failure to reciprocate Olive's homoerotic desire.

As if to symbolically emphasise the imposition of this determining male gaze, Craik's first full introductory description of Olive's appearance takes place, if not explicitly through the eyes of Angus Rothesay, then perhaps no less meaningfully, as Stoddard Holmes has suggested, in his company. Significantly, despite Olive's unconventional and 'supernatural […] nameless beauty' which, as Cora Kaplan has astutely noted, corresponds directly with Sybilla's own 'ethereal' and 'fairy' like appearance, Rothesay's response is somewhat telling (O, p. 23). Deceived by Sybilla's correspondence into believing that Olive was 'the loveliest baby that ever was seen', the absent Angus Rothesay declared that he would be somewhat 'unhappy' if Olive was not to 'grow up [to be] as beautiful as her mother' (O, p. 18). Confronted at last, however, both with his wife's deception and Olive's obvious deviation from his own feminine ideal, Rothesay's long anticipated look of admiration became a 'frenzied gaze' of incredulity. In fact his final response is a complete and absolute refusal to continue to look at Olive: 'He […] turned away, putting his hand before his eyes, as if to shut out the sight' (O, p. 24). As becomes apparent, Rothsay's negation of Olive was founded upon an estimation of her lack of potential to become an object of erotic or sexual fascination in the heterosexual economy. In fact, in moments of boredom and marital disillusion, Rothesay considered his own beautiful wife, Sybilla, to be nothing more than 'a sweet plaything for an idle hour'; a comment that presupposes the disclosure of his adulterous affair with Celia Manners, and which Craik's narrator indignantly seizes upon, declaring: 'A plaything! Would that all women considered the full meaning of the term - a thing sighed for, snatched, caressed, wearied of, neglected, scorned' (O, p. 32). Thus, in failing to be the embodiment of a 'blooming angel', or the potential physical replication of her beautiful and much admired mother or female ancestors, Olive, is therefore condemned by Rothesay to spinsterhood: 'Of course she will never marry. Poor child!' (O, pp. 28, 53).

However, whilst Rothesay's initial and mistaken prophecy is repeatedly emphasised throughout the novel, and can be seen to symbolically configure and

distort some of the same-sex bonds between women, like Olive and Sara (and, by association, Sara's other female friends), its compelling force is also repeatedly undermined. Ironically, notwithstanding perhaps Sybilla, Olive becomes the most desired female in Craik's novel, receiving three proposals of marriage before eventually marrying Harold Gwynne. Significantly, however, Olive also becomes the object of an all-female fascination which explicitly rejects the interference of a narrowly defined heterosexual objectification of women. Visiting her father's relatives in Scotland, Olive is 'loving[ly] welcome[d]' into the predominantly homosocial circle of her Aunt Flora and her tangle of adoring nieces who were 'most anxious to "call cousins" with Olive' (O, pp. 245, 244). Whilst Olive finds herself 'wrapped' in the 'friendly arms' of all four of her 'cousins', it is Marion, the eldest, who holds Olive in particular regard (O, p. 245). Notably, Marion is a young woman on the verge of sexual maturation and who was 'just beginning to find out the difference between romance and reality' (O, p. 245). Although, all of Olive's cousins express a spontaneous affection for her, Marion's almost instantaneous attraction to Olive has a particular scopophilic aspect. Whilst not fully understanding her, Marion was nevertheless fascinated by what she regarded as Olive's 'angel[ic]' face, and found pleasure in just 'watch[ing] her' (O, p. 251). In fact, Marion had rapidly become besotted with Olive, declaring: 'if I were a man, I should fall in love with you' (O, p. 249).

Effectively, the bond between these two young women replays and revises the erotic structures of Olive's earlier relationship with Sara. Unlike Sara, however, whose bond with Olive was organized by the imposition of a sexually objectifying male gaze, Marion's fascination with Olive is defined in terms of a belief in Olive's appearance as being representative of an inner spiritual beauty and integrity:

> I think, if I were a man, I should fall in love with you. […] I don't mean any one who was young and thoughtless, but some grave, wise man, who saw your beautiful soul shining in your face, and learned, slowly and quietly, to love you for your goodness (O, p. 249).

Arguably, given that Marion's remarks are made from a hypothetically male perspective, it might be suggested that, like Sara, Marion had succumbed to Mulvey's definition of 'masculination' and that her fascination with Olive is the

result of her own projected fantasy. However, Marion's comments reveal this fantasy to be somewhat less than erotic. Indeed, Marion's enthralment with Olive's particularly angelic face, itself a signifier of Olive's 'beautiful soul', might be seen to be reiterating contemporary discourses which bestowed upon the middle-class woman the role of 'moral saviour'.[115] In fact, through Marion's description of Olive, Craik's novel might be viewed as contributing to the construction of the (now) notorious Victorian cultural icon, the 'Angel in the House', popularized by Coventry Patmore in his 'domestic epic' of the same name, and published four years after Craik's novel.[116] Whist Marion's comments might still, therefore, imply an identification with a projected patriarchal fantasy, they nevertheless challenge the imposition of an erotic objectification of women, something that Mulvey has argued is fundamental to the male gaze. Effectively, Marion's comments counter those made earlier by Sara, regarding 'men, who think so much about beauty', and as such serve to undermine the sexually objectifying impositions of a male desire that structures female homoeroticism (O, p. 67).

Olive's Scottish relatives are also shown to reject heterosexual bonds that are similarly structured around an objectifying male desire. Most exemplary is the figure of Aunt Flora who remained loyal in memory to a lost opportunity of marriage to a man who had long concealed his love, only revealing it posthumously in a letter. Importantly, however, Flora had decisively distanced herself from being the focus of male interest. Rejecting, we are told, 'plenty' of 'braw wooers' when she was young, she had 'lived, bloomed, [and] withered – an old maid, eventually finding herself as the maternal figurehead of a community of adoring nieces who 'talked continually of dear Aunt Flora' (O, pp. 248, 244). Her decision to recoil from the flattering attentions of numerous male admirers (despite having blossomed into being 'the flower of Perth') seems to have been somewhat inspirational for these young women. Any direct heterosexual attention, it would seem, is viewed with an underlying hostility, and representative of a threat to their closely knit homosocial community. As Olive's cousin, Maggie (Oliphant), explains to her, 'if Aunt Flora had been young, and any disagreeable husband had come to steal her' they would have driven him away and 'pelted him with stones' (O, p. 245). Although Maggie's

[115] Fraser Harrison, *The Dark Angel: Aspects of Victorian Sexuality* (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1979), p. 46.
[116] Elizabeth Langland, *Nobody's Angels*, p. 69.

remark is ostensibly jocular, given that her concerns relate hypothetically to the connotations of a 'young' Aunt Flora, she nevertheless, reveals an awareness of the potential disruption to female same-sex bonds by means of a (hetero)sexual objectification. Additionally, Craik's portrayal of Flora's fate, in stark contrast to that of the other young women in the novel, also serves to underline both the cost and dangers that these women exposed themselves to when they willingly succumbed to that objectification.

Whilst the recoil from a sexually objectifying male gaze by Flora and her nieces may be seen as both an effective method of safeguarding the homoerotic sociality of women, and avoiding disastrous marriage, any widespread withdrawal from the heterosexual economy would, nevertheless, be entirely counterproductive to Craik's own investment in the Victorian middle-class ideal of marriage. Craik's novel, however, illustrates a further, alternative use of female homoeroticism that whilst threatened by an identification with the 'male gaze' is nevertheless dependent upon it. Subsequently, Craik's novel reveals a far more complex dynamic to the discourse of scopophilic female homoeroticism that is absent from Marcus's study. In particular, Marcus not only fails to explore some of the inherent vulnerabilities this discourse may have had by offering women opportunities to covertly (and improperly) solicit a male gaze, but also overlooks its potential to safe-guard against the possible disastrous consequences of that vulnerability.

In her psychoanalytical and historicist study of the gaze, Beth Newman offers a valuable exploration into the complex, and sometimes conflicting relationships between the sanctioned discourses of middle-class Victorian femininity and scopophilic desire which is particularly valuable in understanding the homoerotic dimensions of Craik's novel. In particular, Newman argues that scopophilic desire comes into being when the drive or impulse (to see) settles on objects invested with meaning.[117] According to Newman, it is at this point that the 'social world can intervene most directly in the forms that desire takes'.[118] By marking some objects licit and others as prohibited the 'Socius' can 'manage' its

[117] Beth Newman, *Subjects on Display: Psychoanalysis, Social Expectation, and Victorian Femininity* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004). Objects invested with meaning, according to Newman, are not limited to images of ideal femininity but also concepts of an ideal feminine conduct; inconspicuousness, for instance.
[118] Newman, *Subjects on Display*, p. 13.

subjects through desire.[119] Newman suggests, for instance, that by signifying some objects as forbidden the social order can 'create' an individual 'capable of shame, remorse, and guilt' and therefore encourage compliance in those individuals.[120] In the particular historical context of middle-class Victorian femininity, Newman discusses how 'social scripts' of femininity have intervened on inherent psychical scopophilic drives, and were deliberately 'mobilized' to produce both sanctioned and forbidden desires in the attempt to create compliant individuals.[121] Newman suggests, however, that this aspect of social intervention to influence inherent psychical impulses can 'never completely' guarantee compliance.[122] The modest middle-class woman, for example, who 'internalize[s] cultural ideals', and in so doing comes to desire what is sanctioned as licit, may still harbour desires that do not correspond fully to those ideals.[123] In particular, Newman suggests, that the modest woman who, in accordance with the Victorian discourse of middle-class femininity, 'cultivates inconspicuousness [and] may be what a man desires to have, or what a woman desires to be', nevertheless, may also demonstrate 'contrary desires'.[124] That is to say, desires to display, or exhibit her beauty or sexuality 'continue to manifest themselves'.[125] Significantly, however, Newman suggests that the psychical drive might 'conveniently' appropriate licit desires for reasons other than just those that have been socially approved.[126] This same modest, genteel woman, for example, may 'embrace' ideals of inconspicuousness all 'the better to exercise domestic surveillance' but she has, nonetheless, 'found an outlet for [her] scopophilic impulses'.[127]

In addition, drawing upon the work of Elizabeth Langland, Newman claims that alternative, conflicting aspects of middle-class Victorian feminine discourse offered potential windows of opportunity to 'satisfy' the impulse to be seen or, more aggressively, exhibitionism.[128] That is to say, the 'social imperative' to demonstrate (and police) membership of an increasingly variegated middle class through signs of

[119] Newman, *Subjects on Display*, p. 13.
[120] Newman, *Subjects on Display*, p. 13.
[121] Newman, *Subjects on Display*, p. 21.
[122] Newman, *Subjects on Display*, p. 13.
[123] Newman, *Subjects on Display*, p. 13.
[124] Newman, *Subjects on Display*, pp. 13-14.
[125] Newman, *Subjects on Display*, p. 14.
[126] Newman, *Subjects on Display*, p. 14.
[127] Newman, *Subjects on Display*, p. 14.
[128] Newman, *Subjects on Display*, p. 14.

social practice, such as dress, the attainment of "accomplishments", and leisure activities generated a desire for display that was as much socially sanctioned as the desire for inconspicuousness. This social script of sanctioned exhibitionism, however, was, according to Newman, no less susceptible to 'play' than its counterpart. One example she offers is the vulnerability of social meanings attributed to the dress codes of properly attired middle-class women. In particular, Newman, exposes the unstable meanings attributed to the corset. Whilst the corset represented, on the one hand, a symbol of respectable middle-class female 'self-control and self-containment', it nevertheless simultaneously drew attention to accentuated body parts, and was also associated with the aggressive fetish figure of the dominatrix.[129]

Margaret Beetham has also noted a similar instability of meaning attributed to the corset in her study of the controversy that erupted in the correspondence to *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* during the 1860s. More specifically, Beetham highlights how a number of different and competing discourses regarding discipline, sexual difference, pleasure and desire emerged from the concerns of one mother regarding the (over)-tight lacing of her daughter's corset. In particular, Beetham suggests that whilst the corset was regarded as a means by which middle-class adolescent girls could be 'trained' and 'learn how to […] bear themselves like women' it also became 'eroticised'.[130] In 'mimicking [and exaggerating] the shape of a womanly figure', the corset, Beetham argues, produced something of a paradox: 'respectable femininity became inseparable from the sexuality it sought to repress'.[131] Interestingly, Beetham highlights how discourses of female pleasure and desire emerged in the controversy. One correspondent, for instance, argued that having endured being 'laced

tighter month after month' she should be allowed to display her figure, 'which', she claimed, she knew would be 'admired'.[132]

Significantly, Beetham's study of the 'corset controversy' validates Newman's suggestion that sanctioned cultural practices and discourses of femininity provided opportunities to generate alternative meanings. In particular, both Beetham

[129] Newman, *Subjects on Display*, p. 16.
[130] Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own: Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine, 1800-1914* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 86.
[131] Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own*, p. 86.
[132] Anonymous, quoted in Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own*, p. 87.

and Newman highlight how the corset, ostensibly a sign of respectable and controlled femininity, provided a window of opportunity for women to express their sexuality through licit means.

Given such an understanding, it would seem necessary to consider a number of questions regarding the liberating voyeurism and display of Victorian homoerotic femininity outlined in Marcus's study. This is not, however, to dispute Marcus's claim that middle-class women enjoyed the homoerotic objectification of one another. Indeed, Marcus provides ample evidence that testifies to the pleasure that some of these women found in looking at, and being looked at by each other. Nevertheless, her study overlooks the potential disruption feminine homoerotic display may have had on the gendered 'moral economy' of middle-class Victorian culture.[133] Whilst Marcus argues that women enjoyed looking at and 'being looked at' by other women, the dynamics of this scopophilic relationship were not always entirely homoerotic (BW, p117). As Marcus herself notes, the 'Victorians […] saw *both* men and women as inclined to appreciate women's looks' (BW, p. 61; my emphasis). In Craik's novel, however, it was the beautiful Sara Derwent who suggested that it was 'especially' men who were appreciative of female beauty (O, p. 67). In keeping with Beth Newman's suggestion, therefore, that women, ostensibly 'working within the confines of social acceptability', could 'create new meanings' from social scripts, it seems important to acknowledge that, potentially, at least, the culturally sanctioned pleasure of female homoerotic objectification presented opportunities for women to covertly subvert its meaning.[134]

There is, however, still to be considered the unstable perspective of the onlooker in the scopophilic dynamics of culturally endorsed homoerotic femininity, something that Marcus's study also seems to elide. For example, in her discussion of the relationship between the cultural ideals of Victorian heteronormativity and women's erotic objectification of one another, Marcus fails to address the complexities of a convergence of differing viewpoints generated by these ideals. Whilst her arguments illustrate how women's adherence to the 'imperative' of heterosexual ideals 'promoted', and therefore facilitated a compliance with what she calls the 'compulsory' ideals of mainstream homoerotic femininity, she fails to consider the full significance of the reciprocal nature of these two ideas (BW, pp.

[133] Newman, *Subjects on Display*, p. 16.
[134] Newman, *Subjects on Display*, p. 17.

61-62). That is to say, having, what Newman would regard as, 'incited' the scopic drive to channel desire in accordance with two differing (although not unrelated) cultural ideals of Victorian femininity, this drive was, nonetheless, the means by which adherence to both ideals appears to have been mutually reinforced.

Given Sarah Ellis's suggestion, therefore, that the cultivation of female homosociality advantageously provided a mother with the 'opportunity of observing' her adolescent daughters, it is argued that the discourses of female homoeroticism, identified by Marcus, shared a similar reciprocal relationship with some of the discourses concerning emergent female sexuality.[135] Whilst the scopophilic drive to look, for instance, would find a licit outlet in the socially sanctioned discourses of female homoerotic objectification, this cultural ideal would also be of significant benefit in helping to safeguard against the aforementioned potential dangers of female display facilitated by that very discourse. Conversely, however, the practice of female surveillance (by women) might also be said to reinforce what Marcus has identified as Victorian society's investment in women's 'compulsory homosociability and homoeroticism' (BW, p. 61). In fact, Craik's novel, replete with almost as many gazes as there are women, demonstrates the capacity of female supervision to compound or, to use Marcus's phrase, 'promote a specifically feminine appetite' for attractive women (BW, p. 62). Most notable in Craik's novel is the development of her heroine's 'intense love' for and 'wild devotion' to Sybilla which is shown to emerge after the failure of her relationship with Sara, but more significantly, subsequent to her 'watchful guardianship' over her mother (O, pp.109, 128, 103). When read in the context of Craik's recommendation that we 'look a little more closely at our "girls"', it would seem that Marcus has perhaps overlooked the full perspective of the 'optical apparatus' that she has noted was occasionally included in fashion plates.

Significantly, Craik's novel, in its depiction of Olive's relationship with Christal Manners, illustrates the vital importance of the reciprocal nature of female supervision and homoeroticism. That is to say, with regard to Christal, one of the novel's most notable 'figure[s] of sexuality and hysteria', Olive's gaze is conspicuously absent and the novel culminates in Christal's attempted acts of both

[135] Ellis, *The Mothers of England*, p. 349.

murder and suicide.[136] Olive's failure to have kept this dangerous young woman in sight is compounded early in the novel by Harold's mother, Mrs Gwynne, who 'unveil[s]' to Olive that she 'had watched Miss Manners more closely than any one guesses' (O, p. 215). Mrs Gwynne's suggestion that she observed Christal with *more* of a concerted effort than perhaps others had guessed, not only underlines Craik's later recommendation, but also implies some level of expectation that Mrs Gwynne should, as a matter of course, watch her. Arguably, given that Harold had previously made a disastrous marriage, it might not seem too surprising that Mrs Gwynne 'eagerly watched every woman' with whom he came into contact (O, p. 215). In the cultural context surrounding the novel, however, and the ensuing fears regarding emergent female sexuality, Craik's depiction of Mrs Gwynne's anxieties regarding Christal would be considered highly appropriate by many. Indeed, the adolescent Christal is initially portrayed as embodying an almost un-containable and precocious sexuality. Unlike Olive, a 'woman dwarfed into childhood', Christal is erotically depicted as if she was a fully formed young woman literally wrestling to escape the confines of a child's body: 'Her tall, well-rounded form, struggled through a painful slimness' (O, pp.23, 149).

Notably, however, unlike her relationships with Sara and Sybilla, Olive fails to respond to the vivid eroticism of Christal because she had earlier renounced the imposition of an objectifying male gaze after a previous encounter with Christal's mother, Celia. Although, initially, Olive had expressed an immediate fascination and 'admiration' for the inordinately beautiful and ferocious Celia, having been forced to confront, first hand, the 'degradation' brought about by a combination of exploitative masculine sexual desire and Celia's beguiling beauty, Olive quickly began to re-examine the values invested in desirable femininity by the heterosexual economy (O, p. 131). Reflecting upon her one desire to have been 'beautiful and [therefore] loved!', Olive realizes that male heterosexual desire and, in the overall context of the novel, its corollary, objectified feminine beauty had only brought misery to Celia: '*She* had been both, and what was she now?' (O, p. 132; Craik's emphasis). Effectively, Olive's re-evaluation is presented as a moment of celebration in which she 'rejoiced' at a new found conviction that a 'pure heart' was 'more precious than beauty' (O, p. 132). However, as Craik's narrator also notes,

[136] Stoddard Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction*, p. 51.

during her encounter with Celia, Olive had only partially realized the significance of what she had seen. Olive, we are told, 'could not understand the mystery of half she [had] witnessed' (O, p. 131). Principally, the mystery to which Craik's narrator refers is Olive's ignorance that Celia was her father's rejected mistress and Christal her half-sister. Nevertheless, underlining the principle of this mystery is that Celia's downfall was brought about by her status as a 'white-man's passing toy' (O, p. 131). The sexual nature of this colonial exploitation, however, is not just limited to foreign women. As Craik's novel had earlier made explicitly clear, all women were in danger of simply becoming objects of erotic amusement for men and, more importantly, as Craik's narrator emphasises, although not all woman were aware of this danger, they nevertheless, should be. However, whilst Olive herself is shown to be somewhat liberated from the inherent dangers of self-beguiling feminine beauty, partly because of her own exaggerated sense of deformity, her re-evaluation of desirable femininity becomes the means by which Olive fails to see the dangers faced by Christal and, no less importantly, prevents her from establishing the safeguard of a homoerotic bond with her.

The most striking evidence of Olive's recoil from her previous tendency toward objectifying other women is notably depicted in her initial reaction to Christal who, in the pathetic fallacy of a storm, returns unexpectedly from France and, who, without reservation, undresses before Olive. Whilst Craik's narrator notes that Olive views, 'with no small curiosity', the erotic display of this young woman, bursting out of the wet clothes which 'enveloped' her body, Olive's curiosity in Christal's appearance is related solely to Christal's uncanny resemblance to Captain Rothesay (O, p. 149). This is not to suggest, however, that Olive finds Christal unattractive. Indeed, Christal is a 'girl […] whom [Olive] so wished to love' but is later prevented from doing so by a belief that Christal had 'turn[ed] from her […] in a sort of contemptuous indifference' (O, p. 183). In fact, Olive laments that although 'her heart had sprung to Christal', her own impulsive attraction had, nevertheless, 'died away, possibly from its being so lightly reciprocated' (O, p. 263). Yet, notably, it is Olive who is depicted as resisting Christal's impulsive and ardent attraction to her. Not only does Christal exhibit a continued affection for Olive whilst she was away in Scotland but, more importantly, it is Christal who had demonstrated an immediate and fervent attraction to Olive. That is to say, Olive's initial tender kiss,

an expression of her ‘deep pity’ for what she regarded as a ‘desolate orphan child’, is immediately and ‘passionately returned’ by Christal (O, p. 153).

Equally significant is the confrontation between these two women which is provoked by Christal’s demand for autonomy and which signals her desire to become the object of close interest for a woman who would exert dominance over her. In particular, the conflict is one which brings about Olive’s apparent determination to ‘wrestle’ with Christal’s demands, and Christal’s ‘passionate, yet mournful’ lamentation that she had ‘had no one to control [her], no one to teach [her] to control [her]self’ (O, pp. 182-183). In fact, an underlying aspect of the antagonism generated in the quarrel is Christal’s resentment that Olive devoted so ‘little time’ to her (O, p. 183). Despite, however, the fact that Christal ‘wrathfully struggled’ against Olive’s ‘mild control’, and her claim that it ‘was too late […] to be lessoned’ by Olive, Christal nevertheless concedes to Olive’s ‘entreat[y]’ (O, pp. 276, 183). Given the general consensus of belief amongst the women in the novel that Christal’s ‘strange disposition’ is a mixture of ‘volatile gaiety’ and resolute stubbornness from which ‘[n]o persuasions – no commands – could move her’, Craik’s depiction of Olive’s confrontation with Christal suggests that engaging directly in an almost erotic power struggle provided Olive with a particularly effective means of guardianship over the ‘young and headstrong’ Christal (O, pp.155, 184).

Although, in this particular instance Olive is successful in exacting an influence over Christal, Olive, nevertheless, fails to fulfil her promise to herself (and, Christal’s desire) that she ‘would *never* lose sight of her’ (O, p. 184; my emphasis). Significantly, Olive chooses to undertake a less confrontational approach and to ‘try and guide [Christal] with so light a hand, that the girl might never even feel the sway’ (O, p. 184). By failing, however, to respond in kind to Christal’s passionate nature, Olive undermines the opportunity to firmly establish a reciprocal bond with Christal. Olive becomes increasingly preoccupied with a number of ‘various other interests’ and immediately neglects to keep Christal in view (O, p. 184). Significantly, whilst Olive’s ‘anxiety over this wayward girl […] ceased’, Christal’s desires to form a passionate same-sex bond are allowed to find an outlet through her increasing involvement with the frivolous and ‘idle’ Mrs Fludyer,

a woman who has already taken an instant and 'vehement liking' to Christal (O, pp.184, 155).

Olive subsequently makes, and breaks, a number of similar promises regarding her devotion to and guardianship of Christal, both to herself and others. Most prominent, however, in the disruption to their relationship, is Olive's persistent attachment to Harold Gwynne. Whilst Craik rewards Olive's devotion to Harold with their eventual marriage, Olive's love is, nevertheless, also revealed to be all too self-consuming. Allowing all her 'other affections [to] gr[o]w pale before [this] one great love', Olive effectively leaves Christal to court disaster (O, p. 237). Not only did Olive fail to recognize the unceasing devotion she herself had aroused (since childhood) in Lyle Derwent, but, more importantly, she failed to emulate Mrs Gwynne and did not look closely enough at Christal in his company. Despite later claims that she had known and 'feared' Christal had fallen in love with Lyle, and her continuation to regard Christal as naïve, Olive is shown to have been carelessly oblivious to the dangerous combination of Christal's immanent sexual maturation, and Lyle's unwitting arousal of her emerging 'woman's passion' (O, pp.285, 218).

Whilst Christal's discovery of Lyle's devotion to Olive inadvertently results in her further discovery that she and Olive are half-sisters, and brings about her murderous attack, significantly, this episode culminates in Craik's depiction of an almost chaotic scopophilic game of hide and seek between the two women, mediated by Harold. In fact, Harold, having been sanctioned by his mother to 'exercise an unseen guardianship over' the runaway Christal, appears to be demonstrating to Olive the level of scrutiny she has failed to practise (O, p. 293). Having initially 'watched [Christal] closely, but secretly', and given an elaborate reading of her countenance to Olive, he asks her to take note: 'you see how closely I observe her' (O, p. 294). Although beginning to feel uncomfortable about 'this underhand game', he maintains his diligent surveillance (O, p. 294). Ultimately, however, he concedes that he is '[i]ll fitted' for the task and declares that 'the *duty* is more that of a woman's', and in particular, Olive's (O, p. 295).

Effectively, Craik's depiction of Olive's relationship with Christal replays and reverses some of Olive's earlier relationships with women, and in doing so highlights the important convergence of women's supervision and objectification of one another. Integral to the development of her passionate bond with her own

'hysterical' mother had been Olive's initial 'sense of protection' and 'watchful guardianship' (O, pp. 25, 103). Conversely, but by no means unrelated, having rapidly developed an ardent fascination for her coquettish friend Sara, Olive had initially been able to exert some 'influence' of propriety over her (O, p. 59). That this influence ultimately failed to prevent Sara's impetuous rush into a disastrous and fatal marriage is, in part, the result of Sara's failure to reciprocate Olive's passionate devotion. Whilst Olive had 'delighted in' Sara's beauty, Olive had never been the object of erotic fascination for Sara. Primarily, Sara had only really considered Olive as being 'an amusing companion' who could alleviate her boredom (O, pp. 58-59). Significantly, however, with regard to Christal, Craik's novel illustrates how Olive's failure to embrace the opportunity of a passionate same-sex bond which would facilitate the possibility for vigilant supervision proves almost fatal.

Conclusions

(i) Conflicts of Interest: Professional Women Writers

The cultural endorsement of blurred gendered practices and identities is a fundamental claim made by Marcus in *Between Women*. Marcus, for instance, has innovatively argued that the 'sexual interchangeability' of middle-class husbands was a key factor in consolidating Victorian companionate marriage (BW, p. 87). However, overlooked in her analysis of female homosociality is the destabilized gender identity of the professional women writer, who, as Cosslett has noted, was 'moving *away* from the traditional female role, into the 'male' sphere'.[137] Although Marcus notes that the novelist was central to promoting and disseminating cultural ideals of altruistic femininity and female amity in their fictional work, she nevertheless fails to consider that the professional ambitions of *women* writers, which inevitably brought these authors into competition and rivalry with one another, were highly disruptive of these feminine ideals.

[137] Cosslett, *Woman to Woman*, p. 6. Cosslett's emphasis.

(ii) Homoerotic Surveillance and the Female Gaze in Craik's *Olive*

Whilst Craik's novel substantiates Marcus's claim that the female objectification of women was an integral aspect of middle-class heteronormative femininity, Craik's depiction of the female gaze is suggestive of pluralism in mainstream homoeroticism that points to anxieties the author (and a number of her contemporaries, including Sarah Ellis) had about emergent female heterosexual desire. In both her novel and her didactic text *A Woman's Thoughts About Women* Craik's promotes the idea that ardent or passionate female intimacy was an important rehearsal for marriage. *Olive*, however, articulates a suggestion that adolescent female homoeroticism was also a necessary means by which to manage nascent and potentially excessive female (hetero)sexual desire. Indeed, the novel offers a series of portraits of young women who impetuously rush into marriage with disastrous results. As is demonstrated in Craik's portrait of her heroine's indifference to the precociously erotic figure of Christal Manners, central to safeguarding against the dangers of emergent feminine sexuality is the female gaze. Whilst, in accordance with mainstream homoerotic practices, Craik's portrait of female homoerotic objectification is shown to be a valuable way in which bonds between women were consolidated, Craik's novel also illustrates that the female gaze could (and should) be utilised as an accompanying means of surveillance.

Chapter III

Sisters, Friends and Female Marriage

This chapter explores Eliza Lynn Linton's representations of sisterhood, female friendship and female marriage in her 1880 proto New Woman novel *The Rebel of the Family*. The initial section of this chapter discusses the contradictions that Linton expressed about traditional and unconventional femininity in her journalism and fiction, and argues that these mixed messages are replicated in her engagement with mainstream ideals concerning same-sex female desire. Whilst both Linton herself and her fiction appear to have engaged with and endorsed female homoerotic practices, she nevertheless reveals, both in her journalism and in her fictional portrait of Bell Blount's lesbian feminism in *The Rebel*, a reluctance to accommodate the implicit sexual bonding of female marriage. In my following discussion I draw upon Marcus's account of female marriage and its close association with a number of prominent feminists to suggest that Linton's disparaging portrait of Bell is directly informed by her acquaintance with some of these women, and that her opposition to female sexual bonding is inextricably bound up with her fear that the organized feminist movement would promote widespread misandry.

In the second section of this chapter I explore Linton's representations of female amity and sisterhood, and argue that, in keeping with contemporary Victorian ideals, Linton presents female friendship as a surrogate form of sororal bonding. Whilst upholding the importance of female amity in her novel, female friendship is nevertheless depicted at best as only ever being compensatory for the distinct absence of amity that existed between the novel's heroine and her two sisters. Linton's limited endorsement of female amity, however, is also shown to be informed by a fear that ardent and passionate bonds formed between young women could potentially provoke a female sexual desire for women.

The chapter concludes by drawing upon Helena Michie's poststructuralist reading of Victorian concepts of sororal identity to discuss Linton's fictional portrait of antagonistic and hostile sisterhood. Michie's analysis of complementary dyadic

sororal bonds, however, is developed and complicated in this discussion in order to explore Linton's representation of triadic sisterhood. Whilst Linton's novel highlights the exclusionary and destabilising effects this configuration of sororal bonds has upon its heroine's relationships with her sisters, the novel also presents the instabilities of triadic sisterhood as an important means to facilitate future marriage for its heroine.

Linton the Antifeminist Feminist

In her 1885 autobiography, *The Autobiography of Christopher Kirkland*, Linton (albeit indirectly) described herself as having been 'one of the vanguard of the independent women'.[1] By the time of her death in 1898, however, the self–proclaimed pioneer of emancipated women had become known as one of England's foremost antifeminists.[2] She was described in her obituary notice in the *Times* as a 'vehement and outspoken enemy of all movements for the so-called "emancipation" of women', and by Edmund Gosse a year later, as an 'indomitable warrior in the front rank of anti-feminism'.[3] However, as William Canton reminded readers of *Good Words*, Linton previously 'began her career in revolt'.[4] Having gained her father's begrudging consent, Linton left his home in Keswick and went to live alone in London lodgings to embark on a literary career that began with the publication of two historical novels, including the feminist inflected *Amymone.*[5] During her early years in London Linton was also employed on the *Morning Chronicle*, writing articles about social events, as well as book and theatre reviews. Although, as her first biographer George Somes Layard has noted, Linton was not the 'first woman

[1] Eliza Lynn Linton, *The Autobiography of Christopher Kirkland*, Vol. I, (London: Bentley, 1885), p. 253.
[2] Deborah T. Meem, 'Introduction', Eliza Lynn Linton, *Realities*, ed. Deborah T. Meem, (Kansas City: Valancourt Books, 2010), p. 7.
[3] *The Times*, July 16, 1898; p. 12; Issue 35570; Edmund Gosse, *North American Review* (June, 1899), quoted in 'The Reverses of Britomart' in William Thomas Stead (ed), *Review of Reviews* (July 1899), pp. 70-70.
[4] William Canton, 'From One Point of View' in *Good Words*, December 1901, pp. 645-649, p. 645.
[5] Nancy Fix Anderson has suggested that Linton used this novel as 'a platform to challenge Victorian patriarchy', Anderson, 'The Rebel of the Family: The Life of Eliza Lynn Linton' in Eliza Lynn Linton, *The Rebel of the Family*, ed. Deborah T. Meem (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2002), pp. 428-440, p. 430; Valerie Sanders has also suggested that Linton attempted to promote women's rights in this novel. Valerie Sanders, 'Eliza Lynn Linton and the Canon' in Linton, *The Rebel of the Family*, ed. Meem, pp. 475-487.

newspaper writer', she was, he claimed, honoured with the 'distinction' of being the first female journalist in England to 'draw a fixed salary', which he estimated exceeded £250.[6] Linton's career as a novelist and journalist, however, came to an abrupt halt after the publication of her third novel, *Realities* (1851), a twofold attack on mid-Victorian capitalist and patriarchal society. Linton's 'heretical and bold' novel, which introduced readers to a heroine whose reputation is compromised by her relationship with a married man, and two sisters who supplement their insufficient income from slop-work by prostitution, received scathing reviews.[7] The reviewer for *Bentley's Miscellany* claimed the novel's 'unhealthy tone' left 'a very painful impression' and that it was 'a sad stain on the literary reputation of one of the most gifted authors of the day'.[8] The *New Monthly Magazine*, whilst acknowledging the validity of Linton's attempt to confront existing social injustices, also attacked Linton for her gratuitous bad taste. Her novel, the reviewer wrote, was 'one tissue of […] exaggeration […] and violence'.[9] One of her characters, that of the abandoned wife Emma Vaughan, was declared to be particularly 'repulsive': 'she shocks and disgusts us', the reviewer exclaimed, 'more, perhaps, than we have ever before been shocked and disgusted'.[10]

After the disastrous failure of her novel Linton turned her immediate attention to consolidating a career in journalism which was characterised by her castigation of women. Whilst, by the end of the century, Linton had become known as one of the fiercest adversaries of the figure of the New Woman, her fervent animosity towards unconventional femininity had first gained notoriety with her 'Girl of the Period' articles published in the *Saturday Review* during the late 1860s and early 1870s.[11] Having captured the public imagination with her depiction of a supposed newly emergent generation of 'fast', mercenary and self-indulgent young women who made a 'personal religion' of fashion and who emulated in dress, if not quite in conduct, the style of the *demimonde*, Linton continued to write essays

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[6] George Somes Layard, *Mrs Lynn Linton: Her Life, Letters and Opinions* (London: Methuen Co., 1901), pp. 59-60.
[7] Eliza Lynn Linton, Letter to Richard Bentley, (5th September 1848), quoted in Anderson, *Woman Against Women*, p. 56.
[8] Unsigned, *Bentley's Miscellany* (January 1851), pp. 669-670, p. 670.
[9] Unsigned, 'Novels of the Day' in *New Monthly Magazine* (June 1851), pp. 228-236, p. 235.
[10] Unsigned, in *New Monthly Magazine* (June 1851), p. 235.
[11] Constance Harsh, 'Eliza Lynn Linton as a New Woman Novelist' in Linton, *The Rebel of the Family*, ed. Meem, pp. 456-474, p. 456.

constructing and attacking an almost inexhaustible taxonomy of feminine types and follies.[12]

However, recent critics of Linton's work have noted that her antifeminism was not unproblematic. Constance Harsh has suggested, for example, that although Linton's essays reveal inconsistencies in her conservative arguments, Linton's 'ambivalence about women's issues' became more conspicuous in her novels.[13] Valerie Sanders has also noted a contradiction between the overtly hostile antifeminism in Linton's journalism and the sympathetic recognition in her fiction of the restrictions imposed upon middle-class women's lives. Sanders also suggests that in Linton's novels the traditional 'idealized model' of femininity she constructed in her journalism deteriorates into a series of feeble women 'submitting to be kept a prisoner in her own home'.[14] However, according to Sanders, Linton's fiction nonetheless refuses to countenance any transformation in the lives of middle-class women. Whilst, like many Victorian novelists, Linton offered contrasting portraits of marriage as unappealing and working life as fulfilling for women, she nevertheless only ever depicts the latter as a temporary episode in the life of her heroines. Having 'gesture[d] towards an alternative image of a woman's life', Sanders argues, Linton 'stop[s] well short of endorsing an escape from the confines of young ladyhood'.[15]

The discrepancies between Linton's fiction and journalism, and her apparent ambivalence about middle-class femininity, raise questions about the extent to which Linton's antifeminism was entirely authentic. To raise doubts about the integrity of Linton's antifeminism, however, poses questions about Linton's overall commitment to conservative ideals and values regarding middle-class femininity. Given that Marcus has argued that 'friendship between women [was an] essential' component of mainstream feminine identity, it would therefore be reasonable to suggest that the extent of Linton's ideological commitment to conservative gender ideals would be a determining factor in her subsequent commitment to same-sex female bonds (BW, p. 25).

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[12] Linton, 'The Girl of the Period' in the *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, Vol. 25, Issue, 646, (14th March 1868), pp. 339-340, p. 340.
[13] Harsh, 'Eliza Lynn Linton as a New Woman Novelist', in Linton, *The Rebel of the Family*, ed. Meem, p. 457.
[14] Valerie Sanders, *Eve's Renegades: Victorian Anti-Feminist Women Novelists* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), p. 139.
[15] Sanders, *Eve's Renegades,* p. 202.

Andrea Broomfield disputes entirely the authenticity of Linton's antifeminism and has argued that it was the result of Linton's intense desire to succeed in the literary profession coupled with an intuitive sense of opportunism. After the failure of *Realities* Linton was 'compelled', Broomfield claims, 'to reevaluate her career' and, 'most importantly, what her legitimate talents actually were, and how they could be better used to help her achieve fame and financial security'.[16] Having returned from Paris in 1853, where, Broomfield suggests the author had 'learnt to endure the unsavoury, Darwinistic' rules of journalism, Linton quickly took advantage of the opportunity afforded by the growing market of periodicals and journals which had begun to cater more widely for the demands of an expanding middle-class readership, eager for instruction.[17] At this time, according to Broomfield, the issue of women's rights and the woman question was still relatively unexplored by writers of the day. Having confronted the fact that she had no future as a writer of progressive novels, Linton repositioned herself as an (antifeminist) 'authority on women's wrongs' and wrote articles that 'reduc[ed] the complicated issues involved in the woman question to an accessible level'.[18] Consequently, Broomfield argues, Linton developed her prose style of reductive argument and provocatively exaggerated caricatures, which were well-suited to popular journalism, and exploited emerging gender debates in order 'to write what would sell, rather than produce unprofitable, progressive novels'.[19]

Deborah Meem concurs with Broomfield's suggestion that Linton's profound disappointment at the failure of her third novel proved to be a decisive moment in Linton's life and work and, to a certain extent, agrees that following that failure Linton 'embarked on a pragmatic mission in search of fame and fortune'.[20] However, Meem argues that as a result of the devastating responses to the novel, Linton underwent a genuine ideological change and became an authentically

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[16] Andrea Broomfield, 'Blending Journalism with Fiction: Eliza Lynn Linton and Her Rise to Fame as a Popular Novelist' in Linton, *The Rebel of the Family*, ed. Meem, pp. 441-455, p. 448.

[17] Broomfield, 'Much More Than An Antifeminist: Eliza Lynn Linton and the Rise of Victorian Popular Journalism' in *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 29, No. 2, pp. 267-283, p. 269.

[18] Broomfield, 'Much More Than An Antifeminist', p. 270.

[19] Broomfield, 'Much More Than An Antifeminist', p. 269; see also Valerie Sanders, *Eve's Renegades*. Unlike Broomfield, Valerie Sanders does not suggest deliberate opportunism on the part of Linton to succeed in journalism but she does, however, claim that Linton 'found her way into a prominent place as a journalist by co-operating with [the] specific antifeminist programme' of the *Saturday Review's* editor, Douglas Cook, p. 128.

[20] Deborah Meem, 'Introduction' to Eliza Lynn Linton, *Realities*, ed. Meem (Kansas City: Valancourt Books, 2010), p. 16.

committed exponent of middle-class conservative ideals. Drawing on the work of Foucault, Meem suggests that the scathing reviews functioned first to 'disqualify and invalidate' Linton's vehement critique of a patriarchal capitalist society, and then, 'representing a kind of a "literary Panopticon"', ensured Linton's future compliance.[21] Ultimately, Meem claims that during the period Linton spent working in France as a foreign correspondent, immediately after the publication of *Realities*, she was 'rehabilitated'.[22] Meem also suggests that Linton was not only aware that she had been subjected to a disciplinary process of normalization but also evidenced her knowledge of how that process worked in some of her fiction. In particular, Meem discusses the comments of Jane Osborn, a fictional journalist in Linton's *Sowing the Wind* (1867), one the first novels Linton published after *Realities*:

> give me the real solid pleasure of work - a man's work – work that influences the world – work that is power! To sit behind the scenes and pull the strings – to know that what one says as 'we' in the *Comet* is taken […] as a new gospel, when if one had said it as 'I, Jane Osborn', it would have been sneered at as women's babble – to feel that strange thrill of secret mental power.[23]

Meem draws attention to the fact that Jane Osborn 'refers twice to the idea of power' also emphasising that that anonymous power 'influences the world'. 'This', Meem argues 'is [the] Foucauldian power' that Linton not only acknowledges she had been subjected to but also reveals, through her heroine, that she now enjoyed exerting.[24] Jane's rhapsody, according to Meem, is an expression of Linton's own 'strange thrill' at becoming 'the representative of public morality'.[25]

Meem's arguments, however, are perhaps less convincing than Broomfield's, partly because she does not offer any detailed explanation of how exactly Linton was rehabilitated during her stay in France, but also because of her claims about Linton's engagement with a concept of power which has later been termed

[21] Meem, 'Introduction', *Realities*, p. 17.
[22] Meem, 'Introduction', *Realities*, p. 17.
[23] Linton, *Sowing the Wind*, Vol. III, (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1867), pp. 29-30, quoted in Meem, 'Introduction', p. 18.
[24] Meem, 'Introduction', p. 19.
[25] Michel Foucault, has argued that 'if power was never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really believe that we should manage to obey it?'; Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Vol. I (New York: Pantheon, 1978), trans. Robert Hurley, p. 36; Meem's discussion of Foucault's concept of power is drawn from his *Discipline and Punish* and therefore her analysis overlooks Foucault's concept of the 'repressive hypothesis'.

Foucauldian. Whilst Meem focuses on the disciplinary gaze and self-regulation as means by which members of a modern society are normalized, she fails to develop fully the implications of Foucault's arguments regarding an overestimation in the repressive nature of power. It is true that Linton, by means of her heroine, emphasises her own capability of exerting 'influence on the world' from within the masculine arena of the press (which corresponds to Foucault's claim that 'resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power'), but this implicit correspondence to Foucault's argument is undermined by Meem's suggestion that having been 'reformed' Linton became an uncritical 'mouthpiece for conservative, even reactionary values'.[26] The *Saturday Review*, however, regarded the 'dowdy and roystering' Jane as literally embodying a 'protest' against what it called 'the traditional supremacy of female charms' and also read in Linton's novel a further undermining of conventional gender stereotypes through its depiction of marriage.[27] It could also be argued, however, given another emphasis that Jane Osborn makes in her speech, that Linton uses her heroine's repeated behest to advocate an expansion of opportunities for women's employment outside of the home: 'give me […] work […] work - work […] work'.[28]

In fact Linton's fiction reveals a far more complicated and sometimes ambivalent attitude towards the conservative ideals of femininity and fixed gender roles and identities. In some of her novels, for instance, Linton not only appears to deliberately promote unconventional middle-class femininity at the expense of the ideals she espoused in her journalism, but also denigrates those ideals. In her 1874 novel *Patricia Kemball*, for example, Linton juxtaposes the ungainly and energetic heroine of the title, 'who should have been a boy', alongside her outwardly submissive yet deceitful feminine cousin, Dora, who ultimately becomes an accomplice in the murder of her stepfather.[29] In *Sowing the Wind* (1867), briefly discussed above, Linton's heroine, the masculine Jane Osborn, acknowledges that

[26] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Vol. I (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), trans' Robert Hurley, p. 95; Meem, 'Introduction' *Realities*, p. 17.
[27] Unsigned, *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art*, Vol. 23, Issue 595 (23rd March 1867), pp. 373-374, p. 374. When discussing Linton's depiction of the jealously possessive John Aylott and his submissive wife, Isola, the reviewer suggests that Linton's 'secret impulse, if not avowed motive' was to illustrate what 'pitiful, […] ill-governed creatures men are, and how much wiser, steadier, and more full of capacity are their wives', p. 373.
[28] Linton, *Sowing the Wind*, Vol. III, p. 29.
[29] Linton, *Patricia Kemball* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose and Company, 1874), pp. 82-83.

for her friend, Isola, 'babies and love […] are all very fine', but she nevertheless 'despise[s]' what she calls 'the whole idiotic class of womanish women'.[30]

Thirteen years later Linton created another working heroine in her novel *The Rebel of the Family* (1880). Linton's rebel is the proto-New Woman Perdita Winstanley, a physical and political anomaly within a genteel yet impoverished family struggling to keep up appearances in the face of ever-increasing debt. Shunned by her snobbish widowed mother and sisters for her 'democratic' ideals, the shy, awkward and short-sighted Perdita has neither her elder sister Thomasina's gracefulness nor her younger sister Eva's dangerously captivating beauty. Difference from her siblings is further foregrounded in her resistance to her mercenary mother's demand that her daughters contract lucrative marriages in order to avoid ensuing financial decline and maintain social status. Whilst Thomasina and Eva conform to their mother's demand, Perdita argues that a 'far nobler' solution is 'to work honestly'.[31] However, Perdita's advocacy of women's work is not solely based upon its financial benefits, but also the greater possibilities it provides for a more stimulating and challenging life. The idea of work, for Perdita, not only represents being able to 'use [her] life worthily instead of squandering it on frivolities and wasting it in idleness' , but it should also be demanding and something that she 'would have to learn to do well' (RF, pp. 84, 76). At the intervention of her sister's suitor, Perdita competes for and gains a clerkship at the Post-Office Saving Bank.

Nancy Fix Anderson has suggested that through her depiction of Perdita, Linton ultimately appears to undermine her own convincing arguments for the development of educational and employment opportunities for middle-class women. Rather than portraying her New Woman heroine 'with challenging work' or petitioning for a better system of education for similar women in order to facilitate a self-sufficiency that was more stimulating, Linton's novel, Anderson claims, implies that Perdita's unsatisfactory independence 'would be shared by all [middle-class] women who work[ed] outside the home'.[32] Anderson is certainly correct to claim that Linton's depiction of the Post Office Savings Bank, Perdita's working environment, is somewhat less than inspiring. The clerical duties demanded of those

[30] Linton, *Sowing the Wind*, Vol. III, p. 29, Vol. I, p. 31.
[31] Eliza Lynn Linton, *The Rebel of the Family* (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2002) ed. Deborah Meem, p. 84. All further references will be given in the body of the text following the initials 'RF'.
[32] Anderson, *Woman Against Women*, p. 166.

women employed there, Linton suggests, were 'dry' and monotonous, and 'undertaken simply because of the pressure of poverty' (RF, p. 175). Although Linton openly acknowledges here the necessity for some middle-class women to find work suitably in keeping with their social class, she nevertheless suggests this is a regrettably poor substitute for the roles some of them should have undertaken in marriage and maternity. For example, Linton claims that amongst the 'dolts', 'minxes' and 'silly girls' there were 'bright, intelligent' young women whose true vocational potential had been sacrificed for 'dull office-work'(RF, p. 175). Their 'career as clerks […] was the world's loss' but 'had they been wives and mothers', she argues, then 'it would have been the world's gain' (RF, p. 175).

As if to compound her portrait of clerical work as an intellectually unfulfilling and inferior female occupation, Linton also depicts this sequestered female working environment as offering little or no opportunity for women's friendship to flourish. Perdita's 'romantic' and principled nature, we are told, is something of an anomaly amongst her colleagues, and her professional enthusiasm the source of their ridicule. Even the one significant friendship she forms with the family-orientated Mary Chesterton, which Perdita considered to be 'one of the pleasant passages in [her] present life', is undermined by Linton's description of Mary as '*only* a very charming acquaintance' (RF, pp. 176-177; my emphasis). For Perdita to expend her inherent 'wealth of passionate love' on a girl who could only respond with a 'very mild measure of interest' is, Linton suggests, a '"waste"' (RF, p. 177).

Ostensibly, Linton's analysis of the benefits of female independence afforded by employment in the Post Office Savings Bank is, as Anderson has suggested, rather pessimistic. Yet notably, Perdita's 'disappointment' did not result from her mundane clerical duties but rather from the unwillingness of her fellow colleagues to share her own earnest principles:

> She had expected to find in them the same […] proud consciousness of participating in the conduct of the Imperial Government which made her routine business letters and dry rows of figures essentially poems; and she found instead the dullest indifference […], save as the bank whence they might draw so much per annum (RF, p. 175).

Although Perdita's own ardent enthusiasm for work is presented here as naïvely idealistic, Linton nevertheless implies that for a minority of women like Perdita, paid employment had the potential to offer satisfying alternatives to the 'dead monotony' of home life (RF, p. 172). This is by no means to suggest, however, that Linton was surreptitiously advocating that a career for women should supersede the traditional feminine roles and responsibilities associated with the domestic sphere. Perdita's one friend at the Post Office, Mary Chesterton, and Mary's sisters, for instance, are all compelled by their father's financial insolvency to enter the public arena of work. Work for this 'family of women', Linton notes, was an unfortunate 'expediency' not the realization of a feminist ideal promoted by women like Bell Blount (RF, p. 176). These sisters 'had to turn out into the world' just like their brothers, Linton concedes, but they did so, she argues, 'without the blare of […] publicity' and as such their femininity remained intact and 'the unity of the family was not broken' (RF, p. 176). Similarly, Linton's eponymous 'rebel', ultimately conforms to the middle-class conservative ideal of women's domestic status by agreeing to marry the widower Leslie Crawford.[33]

Arguably, Linton's depiction of Perdita's eventual engagement to Leslie might be read in terms of Valerie Sanders's claim that Linton habitually refused to sanction any effective liberation from the constraints of dependent middle-class femininity. In keeping with conservative gender ideals, for instance, Perdita fervently believes 'that married life is the happiest for women and the most suitable' (RF, p. 145). Linton's novel, however, demonstrates that this is not an unconditional ideal. Unlike her sisters, Perdita refuses to be coerced into marriage by financial necessity, maintaining throughout, by means of her employment at the Post Office, an ardent commitment to companionate marriage. When Linton's specific portrait of her rebellious working heroine is placed in the context of nineteenth-century debates regarding marriage, single women, and female independence it becomes apparent that her novel sympathetically engages with a post mid-century feminist re-evaluation of the social compulsion for middle-class women to marry; not least that of her long time adversary Frances Power Cobbe.[34] In 1862, for example, Cobbe had

[33] Although Perdita does not marry Leslie Crawford, Linton's novel concludes with their engagement. Moreover, Linton's narrator gives no indication that Perdita gave up her work upon her engagement.

[34] Susan Hamilton has argued that Cobbe relished contending Linton's antifeminism by appropriating and reversing some of Linton's caricatures in her own essays. Hamilton suggests also that the

argued that a restriction to working and educational opportunities for single women would only further increase the number of marriages founded on interests of social status or the need for economic security. Conversely, far from deterring women from marrying, as W.R.Greg had earlier claimed and to whom she was directly responding, an expansion in the opportunities for female independence, she claimed, would be highly beneficial to the institution of marriage. '[M]arriage', she argued, 'will be found to be best promoted by aiding and not thwarting the efforts of single women to improve their condition'.[35] Effectively, Cobbe suggested that financially self-sufficient single women would choose to marry for the only reasons that '*ought* to determine' their choice; 'namely, love'.[36]

Linton's pro-feminist arguments, however, were perhaps more severely (and deliberately) undercut through her depiction of the 'handsome hybrid' Mrs Bell Blount: the hypocritical 'Lady President' of a local Women's Rights group, and perniciously misandrist lesbian who, as Meem has argued, sought to seduce Perdita both politically and sexually. [37] Contemporary reviewers would have been all too familiar with the novel's frequent references to the feminine caricatures Linton had created in her journalism,[38] but the inclusion of what Martha Vicinus has claimed was 'the first full-scale realistic portrait of a lesbian villain' appears to have proved far too distasteful for the *Academy*.[39] In his review of the novel E. Purcell refused to discuss Mrs Blount, declaring she 'is a character too odious and the scenes in which she appears too repulsive, even for comment'.[40] The *Saturday Review*, however, devoted a significant part of its analysis to Mrs Blount, and had no doubts whatsoever about what to think of Linton's characterisation: 'On one point, that of women's rights agitation, Mrs Linton's opinions seem clear enough […] – to exhibit

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exchanges between these two women contributed to Cobbe's own particular style of argument in her published collection of public lectures *Duties of Women* (1881): 'Cobbe made something of a career grappling with Eliza Lynn Linton's 'Girl of the Period' essays, gleefully rewriting Linton's anti-feminist caricature of an emancipated woman as the figure of woman disfigured by narrow domestic concerns. Cobbe's previous exchanges with Linton form a vital part of the background to her strategies in *Duties of Women*', Susan Hamilton, *Frances Power Cobbe and Victorian Feminism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 187, n. 27.

[35] Frances Power Cobbe, 'What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids?' in *Fraser's Magazine* (November 1862), Vol. 66, No. 395, pp. 594-610, p. 596.

[36] Cobbe, 'What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids?', p. 596

[37] Meem, 'Introduction' to Linton, *The Rebel of the Family*, p. 12.

[38] Linton refers directly to a number of her articles in *The Rebel of the Family*: 'Modern Man-Haters'; 'Mature Sirens'; and 'The Shrieking Sisterhood'.

[39] Martha Vicinus, *Intimate Friend*, p. 149.

[40] E. Purcell, 'New Novels' in *The Academy and Literature* (19 February 1881), pp. 131-132, p. 131.

in a strong light some of the absurdities […] connected with a movement which she seems to dislike'.[41]

Reviewers were far less certain, though, about Linton's perspective regarding her heroine's unconventional ideals. The *British Quarterly* acknowledged that Linton was drawing upon contemporary social debates regarding the expansion of opportunities for women's education and employment, but whilst touching upon some of the 'pressing present-day social questions' the reviewer argued that Linton tended 'to play with them rather than to treat them seriously'.[42] The *Academy* claimed that the novel 'flounders in a network of [unresolved] dilemmas' and what conclusions Linton intended her readers to make: 'we know no more than she does herself'.[43] Even the *Saturday Review* was perplexed by Linton's ambivalent portrait of her heroine:

> the reader's attention is roused […] by an ardent desire to find out whether what seems at moments the author's advocacy of strange views is serious or not, whether she means to sympathize with or to laugh at her heroine's convictions and inconvenient theories, and whether or not she thinks Perdita's example a desirable one, on the whole, to follow. On none of these points is the reader likely to get much satisfaction.[44]

Despite a decline in the number of progressively-minded heroines in her novels, such as Perdita Winstanley, Linton nevertheless continued to offer complicated portraits and mixed messages about her feminine ideal in her later fiction. In her 1894 novel, *The One Too Many,* Linton launched a direct attack on some of the New Women who had attended the colleges of higher education established during the 1870s and 1880s to provide women with an education that corresponded to that received by their male counterparts in universities.[45] The novel received some favourable comments from reviewers but also prompted an outburst

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[41] Unsigned, *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art* (20th November, 1880), pp. 650-651, p. 650.
[42] Unsigned, 'Novels of the Quarter' in *The British Quarterly Review (*January, 1881), pp. 223-231, p. 227.
[43] E. Purcell, *The Academy* (19th February 1881), pp. 131-132, p. 131.
[44] Unsigned, *The Saturday Review* (20th November, 1880), pp. 650-651, p. 650.
[45] Although Newnham and Girton women's colleges offered an education analogous to that provided in men's universities, only the University of London granted degrees to women during the nineteenth century (from 1878). Linton's particular target is the young women educated at Girton College, founded by Emily Davies in 1869.

of protest from some of the novel's other readers.[46] Responding to Linton's depictions of her Girton Girl anti-heroines (reincarnations of her earlier 'Wild Women'), one enraged former student of the college wrote to the *Lady's Pictorial* (where the novel was initially serialized) claiming that Linton's novel: 'stands alone for its offensive pictures of the so-called results of Girton […] education'.[47] In reply Linton wrote to the editor to refute the former student's claim that Girton College had been specifically singled out for criticism. Linton also strongly defended herself from the former student's attack on the authenticity of her characterisation: 'If she maintains that no girl-graduate smokes, drinks more than is good for her, talks slang, swears, or knows more of the darker secrets of human life than is fitting, I know she is wrong.'[48]

Linton's characterisation of the novel's heroine, however, was more problematic for her readers and Linton's apparent conservative beliefs. Whilst the former student had accused Linton of a deliberate attempt to generate unfounded prejudice against the effects of female higher education (and that of Girton College in particular), Linton's novel did little to promote her ideal of dutiful feminine submissiveness. Despite its dedication to the 'sweet girls still left amongst us, who have no part in the new revolt but are content to be dutiful, innocent, and sheltered', the novel's own 'sweet girl', Moira West, is severely punished for her submissiveness.[49] In what appears to be an inverted retelling of some of the dilemmas faced by Perdita in Linton's earlier novel *The Rebel of the Family*, Moira negates the possibility of working, complies with her mother's demand that she marry a man she does not love (thus denying herself the opportunity later to marry the man that she does love), and commits suicide in despair. Once again Linton was compelled to respond to questions about the novel's characterisation and, in particular, to what extent Moira corresponded to her own conservative gender ideals. In reply to one reader's letter, Linton wrote: 'I did not mean "Moira" to be my idea of a perfect girl. I would not be so foolish as to make a weak, pathetic, crushed, and

[46] Constance Harsh, 'Eliza Lynn Linton as a New Woman Novelist' in Linton, *The Rebel of the Family*, ed. Deborah Meem, pp. 456-474.
[47] Anonymous, Letter to the editor of the *Ladies Pictorial* quoted in George Somes Layard, *Mrs Lynn Linton: Her Life, Letters, and Opinions* (London: Methuen, 1901), p. 290.
[48] Linton, Letter to the editor of the *Ladies' Pictorial*, quoted in Layard, 1901, p. 292.
[49] Linton quoted in George Paston, 'A Censor of Modern Womanhood' in the *Fortnightly Review* (September, 1901), Vol. 70, No. 417, pp. 505-519, p. 514.

invertebrate creature like that an ideal'.[50] Given that Linton had previously described Moira in her novel as being 'the good dear girl of the quiet English home', her subsequent comments to her correspondent appear to seriously undermine her supposedly ideological commitment to conventional femininity. In fact, at times, Linton appears in her fiction to align herself with nonconformist, unconventional and unorthodox femininity.

To make such a claim about the integrity, or at least ambivalence, of Linton's beliefs in the context of Sharon Marcus's study, however, raises further questions about Linton's commitment to same-sex female bonds. Although Linton is absent from Marcus's study, Martha Vicinus, in her own recent study of same-sex female relationships, has argued that Linton's relationships with other women (and those she depicted in her fiction) were distorted by Linton's inability to acknowledge her own homosexuality. Highlighting the fact that Linton inverted her gender in her 'autobiography', and further suggesting Linton deliberately identified with 'masculine characteristics', such as reason and intellect, Vicinus forwards a similar argument to that of Anderson, by claiming Linton resolved her 'psychic conflict' by transforming a loathing of herself into an anger directed 'toward the very women who most attracted her, the flirtatious pretty women that she dubbed the "girl of the period" and "wild women"'.[51] Moreover, Vicinus suggests that Linton's overwhelming fascination with and 'profound attraction to beautiful women' repeatedly propelled 'friendship into the realm of erotic tension'.[52] Whilst Vicinus's reading seeks to emphasise that Linton regarded her desire for other women as shameful and aberrant, when situated within Marcus's argument regarding the central place of female bonds within Victorian femininity, Linton appears to be both fully conversant and engaged with mainstream female homoeroticism. In fact Linton's appreciation of attractive femininity did not go unnoticed or unapproved by some contemporary reviewers of her work. The *Athenaeum*, in its appraisal of *Sowing the Wind,* for instance, suggested that rather than being a 'misogynist' or 'scoffer at women', Linton expressed 'a sincere admiration for feminine grace and

[50] Linton, Letter to Alyce Bagram (January 1894) quoted in Layard, 1901, p. 294.
[51] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. 144; Anderson, *Woman against Women*. Anderson describes her conflated study of Linton's life and work as a psychobiography, emphasising the significant autobiographical context of Linton's work. Central to Anderson's study is Linton's gender transposed fictional autobiography, *The Autobiography of Christopher Kirkland*.
[52] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. 150.

virtue'.[53] The anonymous publisher's reader of Linton's autobiography, however, found the author's fascination with feminine beauty to be rather tiresome. Although the 'somewhat numerous' accounts of Linton's 'love-affairs' with (other) women were excused by the reader as being the inevitable consequence of a character whose 'passion[ate]' nature was 'immense and unrestrained', Linton's apparent delight in the visual spectacle of women was treated with less tolerance: 'we should be content to hear less about the exact shape of ladies' limbs, and the quality of their complexions'.[54]

Female Marriage, Feminism and Bell Blount

Perhaps not unsurprisingly, however, given her uncertain or ambivalent conservatism, Linton was less than enthusiastic about the implicit sexual bonds that united women who lived in what Marcus has argued were culturally accommodated "female marriages". In 1889, for instance, Linton noted that as a result of the recent expansions in women's social and economic independence they had begun to set up homes and 'chum together' in what she called 'quasi-matrimonial combination[s]'.[55] Whilst Linton was grudgingly prepared to acknowledge that these all-female domestic arrangements may have had practical benefits, she appears more than unwilling to countenance the possible sexual terms on which some of these households were structured. Such an arrangement, Linton argued, had 'its uses if also its absurdities - and sometimes something graver than absurdity'.[56] Despite the ominous tone of Linton's apparent distaste for the 'quasi-matrimonial' relationships of women, however, Marcus has suggested that a number of high profile Victorian middle-class women were able to live openly with other women without being labelled deviant or suffering social ostracism. In fact, Marcus persuasively argues that far from covertly existing within a marginalised subculture, some of those women who lived in female marriages were fully integrated into the core of

[53] Unsigned, *The Athenaeum*, (9 March 1867), pp. 316-317, p. 317.
[54] Unsigned reader's report for Linton's publisher George Bentley, 18th October 1885, quoted in Anderson, *Woman Against Women*, p. 179.
[55] Linton, 'The Ethics of Friendship' in *The Universal Review* (November 1889), Vol. 5, No. 19, pp. 332-347, p. 332.
[56] Linton, 'The Ethics of Friendship', p. 332.

respectable Victorian middle class.[57] Marcus cites, for instance, the example of internationally renowned actress Charlotte Cushman who became a central figure in the celebrated community of women artists based in Rome, where she became involved in a number of sexual relationships with other women, conducting, 'in full view of her friends and the public', two long term partnerships: first with the feminist activist Matilda Hays and then, subsequently, with the sculptor Emma Stebbins. Cushman also simultaneously conducted a number of affairs with other younger women, most notably with Emma Crow whilst being 'married' to Stebbins.

Both Marcus and Vicinus argue that the manner and form in which Cushman conducted her relationship with Crow not only exemplifies the way in which the celebrated actress was able to negotiate proscriptions against incestuous desire but also testifies to the social acceptance of her relationship with Emma Stebbins. Marcus, for example, suggests that by successfully contriving to contract a marriage between her adopted son and Crow, and assigning to her younger lover a multiplicity of roles that included daughter, niece, daughter-in-law and, implicitly, wife, Cushman was able to indulge fully in an 'incestuous fantasy' whilst simultaneously constructing it as conventional (BW, p. 198).[58] The 'normative cast of even Cushman's most hidden desires', Marcus argues, 'helps to explain why she was not branded as deviant in her lifetime' (BW, p. 199). Similarly, Vicinus has suggested that Cushman structured her covert relationship with Crow around a fantasy of incest and that 'erotic ecstasy was mingled with Cushman's delight in turning her beloved into a family member'.[59] Cushman's endeavours, however, to conceal the erotic nature of her relationship with Crow were not just to safeguard against charges of deviancy but to avoid also the revelation of her marital infidelity. As Marcus and Vicinus have noted, Cushman regarded her relationship with Stebbins as being totally analogous with legally sanctioned heterosexual marriage, predicated upon vows of fidelity. Fearing discovery of their relationship by those

[57] Sharon Marcus defines a subculture as a social group based upon 'a limited number of shared traits […] that coheres through its separation from the mainstream'. In contradistinction, Marcus defines a network as a series of overlapping 'social alliances' and which is consolidated by 'its relative openness and internal variety' and associations with other networks. Marcus, *Between Women*, p. 202.

[58] Marcus suggests that in taking the Cushman name, Crow, 'became in some sense Cushman's wife', *Between* Women, p. 198. For further evidence of Cushman's quasi-incestuous desire for Crow see also Charlotte Cushman's letter to Emma Crow Cushman, 26th January 1865, quoted in Lisa Merill, *When Romeo Was a Woman: Charlotte Cushman and Her Circle of Female Spectators* (Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 1999), p. 209, quoted in Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. 43.

[59] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. 43.

within her circle who might realise that it exceeded the boundaries of love of kin and friendship Cushman later warned Crow about the need for absolute discretion. '[T]here are people in the world' Cushman declared, 'who could understand our love for each other. Therefore it is necessary that we should keep all expression of it to ourselves - & not demonstrate too clearly our great devotion to each other'.[60]

Cushman's immediate concern, as Vicinus has noted, was obviously to avoid the 'observation […] envy & jealousy' of Emma Stebbins.[61] Yet, as Marcus notes, Cushman was also concerned about the perceptions of the other people in her circle. The disparity between Cushman's deliberate attempts to keep her relationship with Crow clandestine whilst living openly with Stebbins (and previously Hays) suggest, Marcus claims, that Cushman was not afraid of being seen to be involved in an implicitly sexual relationship with another woman but that she feared 'being exposed as adulterous'(BW, p. 201).

Marcus offers further evidence of the cultural legitimization of Cushman's female marriages and, more implicitly, of female marriage in general, by drawing attention to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's discussion of Cushman and Hays's earlier relationship. In a letter to her sister, Barrett Browning declared: 'I understand that she & Miss Hayes [*sic*] have made vows of celibacy & of eternal attachment to each other – they live together, dress alike […] it is a female marriage'.[62] Whilst noting the ambiguity of Barrett Browning's use of the term 'celibacy', which Marcus claims might be regarded as associating 'female marriage with sexual renunciation', Marcus nevertheless chooses to read Barrett Browning's comment in terms of a renunciation of heterosexual marriage. That is to say, Marcus argues that by describing the two women's vows of celibacy in the context of their 'eternal attachment' to one another Barrett Browning 'redefines celibacy as a mutual vow never to leave one another to marry men' (BW, p. 202). Marcus supports her interpretation by suggesting that Barrett Browning's ultimate description of the two women's relationship as a '*female* marriage' serves to differentiate it specifically

[60] Charlotte Cushman to Emma Crow (3rd May 1860), quoted in Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. 43.
[61] Cushman to Crow (3 May 1860), quoted in Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. 43.
[62] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, cited in Robert Browning, *Dearest Isa: Robert Browning's Letters to Isabella Blagden*, ed. Edward C. McAleer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1951), quoted in Marcus, *Between Women*, p. 201.

from heterosexual matrimony through male absence whilst implicitly acknowledging its sexual dynamic.[63]

Marcus also suggests that the observations made by Mrs Corkran, an acquaintance of Cushman, which Barrett Browning related to her sister, draw attention to the fact that some of those within respectable middle-class Victorian society were not only indifferent to Cushman's female marriage but also considered it to be a somewhat unexceptional relationship between women. Having confessed that she had 'never heard of such a thing', Barrett Browning is informed by Corkran that 'it is by no means uncommon' (BW, p. 202). Marcus also observes that although the poet's comment regarding the 'unimpeachable character' of Cushman makes no connection to her female marriage, Barrett Browning was certainly not deterred from forming strong social and familial bonds with either Hays or Cushman: 'Far from suggesting that she might want to avoid Cushman and Hays, [Barrett] Browning writes that she expects to see a good deal of them – and she did, often bringing along her husband and their young son' (BW, p. 202). The integration of the Brownings into Cushman's social circle, Marcus argues, was one of the many examples of a wider extant network of social bonds that united those '[w]omen in female marriages or interested in [homo]sexual liaisons' with other well-known and respected legally married women who not only sought the society of Cushman but were also 'eager' to meet with and befriend other female artists based in Rome (BW, p. 203).

Vicinus, too, has noted the importance of this 'open community' of independent artists and, in particular, the pivotal role Cushman's presence had in furthering its links with mainstream or conventional middle-class Victorian society. Established in the early 1850s this celebrated society of Anglo-American expatriates became, over the next two and half decades, a creative haven for women sculptors, actors, artists, writers, journalists, and their sponsors. In addition to Hays and Stebbins, other notable female members of Cushman's circle who were involved or interested in establishing relationships with women included the actress Adelaide Sartoris, sculptors Harriet Hosmer and Mary Lloyd, and Lloyd's lifelong companion, the writer and political activist, Frances Power Cobbe. Enthusiastic admiration for this community of independent and emancipated women artists

[63] Quoted in Marcus, *Between Women*, p. 201. My emphasis.

resulted in it becoming a vital destination for affluent travellers of Europe who, according to Vicinus, considered that '[a]n invitation to one of Cushman's soirées was essential for a successful visit to Rome'.[64]

Sharing particular eminence within this group, alongside Cushman, was Harriet Hosmer, whose most successful artistic achievement came in 1855 with her sculpture *Puck*, reproductions of which earned the sculptress an estimated $30,000 and a Royal seal of approval.[65] Hosmer not only gained a reputation as an important and successful female artist, however, but also became, like Hays, renowned for her somewhat unorthodox masculine attire. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, for instance, described Hosmer as being 'very clever and very strange' and in similar fashion to Hays, 'dresse[d] like a man to the waist'.[66] Notwithstanding Hosmer's extended flirtation with Hays during the latter's 'marriage' to Cushman, Vicinus suggests that Hosmer was involved in at least one same-sex partnership that was possibly sexual; namely, with the widowed Lady Ashburton. Although offering no definitive proof, Vicinus suggests that Hosmer's correspondence to Lady Ashburton is highly suggestive of a happy and relatively fulfilling sexual bond. After having previously formed a 'close friendship' with another widowed patron, Lady Marion Alford, whose friendship Vicinus suggests might also have been of a more amorous nature, Hosmer and Ashburton formed 'the longest and most important relationship of their mature lives'.[67] Unlike Cushman's relationships with Hays and Stebbins, however, Hosmer and Ashburton's bond was not predicated on the visible permanence of domiciled marriage. Being less reliant upon the presence of a devoted partner, Hosmer and Ashburton preferred instead to live more independently of each other, leaving Hosmer at liberty to engage in a practice of innocent open-ended flirtations with both men and women. As Vicinus notes, Hosmer was keen to promote herself as an independent female artist whose rejection of heterosexual marriage was premised on a refusal to accept the constraints imposed upon legally married women:

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[64] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. 33.
[65] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. 47; in 1859 the Prince of Wales purchased a *Puck*, 'adding to [Hosmer's] fame among the British aristocracy', Vicinus, p. 48.
[66] Elizabeth Barrett Browning (30th December 1853), *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Letters to her Sister, 1846-59*, ed. Leonard Huxley (London: John Murray, 1929), p. 196, quoted in Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. 36.
[67] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. 49.

> […] an artist has no business to be married – for a man it is all well enough, but for a woman on whom matrimonial duties and cares weigh more heavily, it is a great moral wrong, I think, for she must either neglect her profession or her family, becoming neither a good wife or [*sic*] good artist. My ambition is to become the latter, so I wage eternal feud with the consolidating knot.[68]

Noticeably, Hosmer constructs marriage in terms of maternity, its most visible manifestation of sexual bonds, which emphasises further her definition of marriage as specifically heterosexual. Yet as Vicinus suggests, an awareness of Cushman's powerful and controlling position within her own relationships with Hays and Stebbins might also have been a determining factor in Hosmer's apparent reluctance to involve herself in an all-engrossing same-sex female marriage. Moreover, however, Vicinus claims that by casting herself in the role of incorrigible yet innocuous flirt, Hosmer was able to deflect from herself some of the 'censure that fell upon the notably more intense Hays and Cushman'.[69] As Vicinus's claims suggest, Hosmer appears to have been aware that female coupledom was not universally endorsed by respectable Victorian society and as such it may be argued that Linton was neither unique in her disapproval of female marriage nor that her disapproval was necessarily prompted by the advent of sexological discourse in the 1880s. Indeed, as will be discussed below, Linton's condemnation of women's 'quasi-matrimonial' relationships and her earlier (1880) portrait of Bell Blount are informed by her acquaintance with a number of women who were associated with both the emergent feminist movement of the 1850s and part of Hosmer's artistic circle.

Hosmer appears, however, not to have been so circumspect about how the earlier relationship she had formed with Lady Alford may have been interpreted by some of those within the artistic community. In 1860 Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote to Isa Blagden and recounted with some relish a scene of particularly notable devotion in which Lady Alford 'knelt down before Hatty [Hosmer] the other day & … placed on her finger … the most splendid ring you can imagine – a ruby in the

[68] Harriet Hosmer Letter to Wayman Crow (7 August 1855), in Dolly Sherwood, *Harriet Hosmer, American Sculptor, 1830-1908* (Columbia : University of Missouri Press, 1991), p. 124, quoted in Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. 48.
[69] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. 49.

form of a heart, surrounded and crowned with diamonds'.[70] Vicinus suggests that although the shape of Alford's gift might convey 'something more intimate' than the discreet offer of financial insurance or homage to a genius, a definitive retrospective interpretation of its significance is unlikely given the dearth of extant information about Alford's life. Nevertheless, given that it was Elizabeth Barrett Browning, by this time fully conversant with the custom of female marriage, who observed and then documented an event that potently echoed an enactment of betrothal, it would seem likely that the poet might have regarded Hosmer's subsequent relationship with Alford in terms equivalent to Cushman and Hay's 'female marriage'. Furthermore, whilst Barrett Browning invites Blagden to 'imagine' an act that appears to exceed playful flirtatiousness the poet's account implies that she was herself a direct witness of this episode. Thus, given the possible connotations of Lady Alford's unconcealed gesture it might be argued that Hosmer was less guarded about this earlier relationship. When read from this perspective, Hosmer's ensuing relationship with Lady Ashburton might have been regarded by some as adulterous and, as such, might in part also explain Hosmer's reluctance to promote overtly an implicit sexual relationship with Ashburton.

Regardless, however, of the extent to which the intimacy between Hosmer and Alford was or was not sexual, Hosmer's subsequent relationship with Lady Ashburton, herself a friend of Lady Alford, would seem to support Vicinus's argument that the Rome community of artists functioned as a laboratory for the sexual self-fashioning of some female visitors who formed and reformed bonds on terms fluctuating from the 'homosocial' to the 'homoerotic' with some of those women resident within the community.[71] Of those numerous female visitors who 'experiment[ed] emotionally' with other women 'before settling either with a woman friend or into heterosexual marriage' was the British feminist Bessie Rayner Parkes who, according to Vicinus, conducted a 'passionate friendship' with Matilda Hays before eventually marrying the Frenchman Louis Belloc in 1867.[72]

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[70] Elizabeth Barrett Browning Letter to Isa Blagden (20 March, 1860), quoted in Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. 48. Barrett Browning does not appear to identify which finger the ring was placed on.
[71] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. 34. Marcus has observed that Vicinus's definition of the term 'erotic' extends to the sexual. Thus, Vicinus is arguing that some of Cushman's female visitors were involved in relationships with other women that varied from the sexual to the asexual.
[72] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. 34.

Surprisingly, given Linton's warnings about the 'grave' dangers of female marriage, the apparently promiscuous social and sexual relationships that co-existed between women did not deter her from visiting this community. In fact during an eight year period of travelling Europe, primarily throughout Italy, Linton made five visits to Rome. By the time of her first visit, in 1876, Cushman had long since removed herself and the cultural significance of the artistic community had begun to decline, although it was still home to a number of writers and artists.[73] Linton had previously met Cushman much earlier in her life, however, and appears to have become disapprovingly cognisant of Cushman's unorthodox reputation after this meeting. In her autobiography, for instance, Linton acknowledged that Cushman 'had some superb qualities' but provocatively declared: '[t]hings cling about her name which it is as well not to disturb, and the grave, though dumb, is the most potent of all advocates'.[74] It would seem likely, in fact, that Linton, like Barrett Browning, may have become aware of the sexual nature of Cushman's relationships with other independent women through her friendship with Mrs Corkran, wife of the *Morning Chronicle* journalist Frazer Corkran. According to Anderson, Frazer Corkran had initially helped Linton during her post-*Realities* career as a foreign correspondent in France and had also welcomed Linton into his home despite criticism for allowing his family to associate with the author of such a scandalous novel. Excepting one of Corkran's daughters, Henrietta, Linton appears to have been well-regarded by the Corkrans, and considered herself to have quickly become 'an outlying member of the family, round whom the children clustered'.[75]

In addition to the possibility of acquiring an indirect knowledge about Cushman and her community of women who loved women, through her close association with the Corkrans, Linton gained direct entrance into its remaining colony of writers and artists. An account given to Linton's first biographer by Beatrice Sichel, who accompanied Linton during the first four years of her travels, suggests that both she and Linton certainly enjoyed socialising with some of those notable figures who still remained within the artistic circle: 'The glorious time we

[73] Cushman permanently left Rome in 1870 after being diagnosed and unsuccessfully treated for breast cancer the previous year. She returned to her profession of acting and continued up until her death in 1876 (the year of Linton's first visit to Rome).
[74] Linton, *The Autobiography of Christopher Kirkland* (Brighton: Victorian Secrets Ltd., 2011) eds. Deborah T. Meem and Kate Holterhoff, p. 142.
[75] Linton, quoted in Anderson, *Woman Against Women*, p. 67.

had together in Florence, Sienna, Rome, and Naples! […]. And the interesting people we met!'.[76] Although not exhaustive, the list of 'interesting people' Sichel chooses to single out and, rather flatteringly claimed had 'gathered round Mrs Linton' included the founding member of the artistic community, William Wetmore Story, Adelaide Sartoris and Harriet Hosmer, all of whose anecdotes Sichel suggests would fill a book.[77]

On a brief return visit to England in 1879 and 1880 Sichel married and, contrary to original plans, did not return to Italy with Linton. Whilst in England Linton published *The Rebel of the Family* in which, as Anderson suggests, Linton 'explicitly condemned the idea of women loving women instead of men'.[78] Anderson, however, implies that Linton's denunciation was in part a self-rebuke born of her conflicting sexual desire for the younger woman. Although there is no doubt, as Anderson observes, that in her autobiography Linton compares 'her loss' of Sichel to marriage with the 'trial' of the 'breakup of her [own] married life', Anderson nevertheless overlooks Linton's description of Sichel's familial status of 'quasi-daughterhood'.[79] In doing so, Anderson disregards the one explicit loving relationship between women that Linton depicts in her novel; namely, that of Perdita and Mrs Crawford. Consequently, given Anderson's reading of *The Rebel* as semi-autobiographical, she fails to recognize the possibility that Linton's novel may have represented a form of reconciliation for her own 'quasi' maternal loss. That is to say, whilst Mrs Crawford experiences the fatal loss of her own daughter, Florence, her grief is to a great extent assuaged by her relationship with Perdita, who had already claimed the older woman as her own 'darling […] dear dear […] second mother' (RF, p. 383). More notably, however, Anderson overlooks the impact that Linton's recent visits to Rome may have had on her novel. As Meem has argued, Linton's acquaintance with Hosmer, Hays and Sartoris appears to have had a significant influence on Linton's subsequent fiction and that her portrait of Bell Blount was the 'first fully realized "modern" lesbian woman in English literature'.[80]

Perhaps more surprisingly, however, is that in her own reading of the *The Rebel*, in a journal article of 2009, Marcus also overlooks the influence that these

[76] Beatrice Sichel, Layard, *Mrs Lynn Linton*, p. 194.
[77] Sichel, Layard, *Mrs Lynn Linton*, p. 194.
[78] Anderson, *Woman Against Women*, p. 67.
[79] Linton quoted in Anderson, *Woman Against Women*, p. 67
[80] Meem, 'Introduction', *The Rebel of the Family*, p. 11.

women had upon Linton's depiction of Bell. Although Marcus briefly notes that Linton had known 'many of the prominent lesbians of her day' she mistakenly argues that Linton's portrait of Bell (and, in particular, Bell's female marriage) was informed by the nascent figure of the "New Woman" who was to emerge in the last two decades of the nineteenth-century.[81] In response to the manifestation of this later generation of emancipated middle-class women, and the ensuing 'controversies' that accompanied their 'new claims for independence', novelists such as Linton, Marcus suggests, began to offer their readers fictionalized portraits of lesbian (anti)domesticity.[82] Although, according to Marcus, these fictional accounts ostensibly functioned as a means for authors to 'criticize' lesbian life she also notes that many of the accompanying portraits of heterosexual family life were also depicted by these authors as being dysfunctional.[83] Marcus correctly observes, for instance, that whilst Linton 'equat[es] lesbianism with antidomesticity' her portrait of the Winstanley home also falls well below the domestic ideal because it fails to provide either emotional or material comfort for Perdita.[84] Thus, notwithstanding the authorial censure of lesbianism, late nineteenth-century Victorian readers, Marcus claims, were being 'informed' that lesbian domesticity 'had become an option' at the same time their confidence in heterosexual home-life was being undermined.[85] In fact Marcus suggests that a careful reading of *The Rebel* reveals that Linton's didactic narrator denounces Bell and Connie's lesbian domesticity not because of its subversive threat to heterosexuality but because it replicates rather than reimagines the cultural impositions of gender hierarchy. By foregrounding Connie's economic dependence upon and subsequent subservience to Bell, Linton's narrator, Marcus argues, 'condemns Bell's household because her home life reveals her to be more of a patriarch than a feminist'.[86] That Linton utilizes Bell and Connie's relationship as a means to compound attacks made elsewhere in the novel upon mercenary heterosexual marriage is certainly true. It is highly improbable, however, as Marcus suggests, that Linton's condemnation of

[81]Marcus, 'At Home with the Other Victorians', p. 126.
[82] Marcus, 'At Home with the Other Victorians', p. 122.
[83] Marcus, 'At Home with the Other Victorians', p. 122.
[84] Whilst Marcus offers an accurate analysis of the Winstanley home, she is mistaken in her assertion that Linton's novel 'fails to provide any example of a heterosexual household that does embody the domestic ideal'. As noted earlier in this chapter, the home of Perdita's friend Mary, which contrasts starkly with Perdita's own, is depicted as being entirely emotionally self-sufficient.
[85] Marcus, 'At Home with the Other Victorians', p. 122.
[86] Marcus, 'At Home with the Other Victorians', p. 127.

Bell is primarily based upon her failure to reconstruct (female) marriage in terms of a renunciation of conventional gender hierarchy. Even Linton's unorthodox heroine, as Sanders has noted, embraces conservative gender ideals as being fundamental components of companionate marriage.[87] As Linton's narrator approvingly declares, unlike her would-be mentor Bell, Perdita 'thought that the happiness or unhappiness of married life depended chiefly on the woman, and that wifely submission was essentially womanly grace' (RF, pp.150-151).

When read within the context of Linton's earlier periodical journalism, however, it becomes clear that her disparaging portrait of (Bell's) lesbian domesticity represents a continuation of the author's literary construction of organised feminism as a conflation of emancipation and ersatz masculinity. The association between nineteenth-century female independence and masculinity was, of course, nothing new. As Vicinus and Sanders have noted, the liberated or 'active, mannish woman' had been a familiar figure in society since at least the beginning of the nineteenth-century.[88] Sanders, for instance, has shown that Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) was a significant catalyst for numerous anti-feminist portraits of emancipated masculine women who were depicted as being 'unnatural' in their 'rejection of childbearing'.[89] Similarly, Vicinus has argued that when sexologists Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis came to 'identify lesbians by their '"masculine" behaviour' and attire, in the late-nineteenth century, 'both were simply confirming the long-standing representations of women's social transgression as both a symptom and a cause of their sexual transgression'.[90] Established stereotypes would certainly appear to have informed Linton's portrait of Bell. Sanders, for example, has suggested that Bell's 'role in the novel as [Perdita's] temptress' can be seen to accord with the much earlier anti-feminist tradition of depicting the older "woman rights" woman as a 'dangerous [threat] to naïve young heroines who might be taken in by their extravagant theories of liberty'.[91] In fact Sanders highlights the close resemblance that Linton's 1880 portrait of Bell has with

[87] Sanders, for instance, argues that Perdita's initial 'status as rebel against the family and society' is ultimately transformed into 'champion of sound [conservative] views and unshakable morality', Sanders, *Eve's Renegades*, p. 70.
[88] Vicinus, '"They Wonder to Which Sex I Belong": The Historical Roots of the Modern Lesbian Identity' in *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Autumn, 1992), pp. 467-497, p. 479.
[89] Sanders, *Eve's Renegades*, p. 27.
[90] Vicinus, '"They Wonder to Which Sex I Belong"', p. 484.
[91] Sanders, *Eve's Renegades*, p. 26.

Harriet Freke, the self-proclaimed 'champion for the Rights of Women', in Maria Edgeworth's 1801 novel *Belinda*.[92] Although she is less 'outrageous' than Linton's lesbian villainess, Harriett, as a 'loud and boisterous feminist', Sanders argues, nevertheless 'prefigures Bell Blount'.[93]

As a prolific and prominent contributor to the gender debates that predated *The Rebel*, however, Linton's portrait of Bell is also inevitably informed by reference to her own antifeminist discourse which was aimed at an earlier generation of emancipated women than Marcus's reading of the novel would have us suppose. That is to say, prior to the publication of *The Rebel*, Linton had not only relentlessly aligned organised feminism with misandry but also consistently equated it with a contradictory misappropriation of male authority and identity, as well as sexual transgression. In her article 'Emancipated Women' published in 1869, for instance, Linton argued that there had emerged a specifically middle-class group of feminists whose entrance into the workplace had resulted only in their 'aping the meaner man'.[94] Careful not to name, yet clearly alluding to a number of prominent mid-century feminist pioneers, Linton condemns the women's rights movement primarily on the basis of its figureheads' deliberate deviation from mainstream femininity and heteronormativity, rather than contesting outright the premise of its broader social and political aims. Indeed Linton conceded that 'the Rights of Woman *is* a cause, and one not wholly uncalled for nor unrighteous'.[95] It was true, she argued, that women were unjustly disadvantaged and that 'both society and the laws unite to oppress and wrong us'.[96] Linton's conciliation is significantly tempered however by her disclaimer that the validity of this cause was being damaged by an 'illogical' feminist movement that was 'man hating yet man imitating' and which, in its endeavour to invert societal gender hierarchy, solicited women's abjuration of matrimony and maternity.[97] Notably, those responsible for instigating and directing this assault on heteronormative middle-class femininity, Linton claimed, had

[92] Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda* (1801; ed. Eva Figes, London: Pandora Press, 1986), p. 208; quoted in Sanders, *Eve's Renegades*, p. 26.
[93] Sanders, *Eve's Renegades*, p. 26. Sanders mistakenly describes Bell as a 'divorcee'.
[94] Linton, 'Emancipated Women' in *Ourselves: Essays on Women* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1884), pp. 43, 47. This collection of essays was originally published by Routledge & Sons (London) in 1869 and included articles that had previously appeared in *Belgravia*, *Macmillan's* and *Temple Bar*.
[95] Linton, 'Emancipated Women', p. 40. Linton's emphasis.
[96] Linton, 'Emancipated Women', p. 41.
[97] Linton, 'Emancipated Women', pp. 42, 46.

abruptly appeared during the 1850s and had been well-known (if not notorious) for adopting a masculine appearance:

> This branch of the sect suddenly blossomed out about fifteen years or so ago. It would be invidious to mention the names of the leaders; but many of us can remember how all at once appeared a small number of epicene-looking women, with cropped hair […]; cloth jackets cut like a man's […] and with a certain little-swaggering air that was by no means badly caught'.[98]

Of more immediate concern for Linton, however, beyond that of cross-dressing, was her belief that those independent women who had dedicated their lives to campaigning for women's equal rights were fundamentally misanderous and primarily motivated by a 'kind of revenge' which, she implied, encouraged female heterophobia and gyneolatry.[99] Although emulating men, Linton claimed, this group of feminists nevertheless regarded women as the 'flower of the human aloe'.[100] The principal figures of the movement, she noted 'were all unmarried women' who had denounced 'motherhood [as] degrading in its animal instinct', and whilst it was true , she argued, that not all emancipated women hated men they nevertheless devoted themselves to their more zealous leaders:

> I think they may always count upon a large dead-weight of spiritless sisters who can never be stirred up to this hatred of men, but who naturally turn to them, and love them, and cling about them, like the parasites they are'.[101]

In subsequent articles Linton continued to argue that feminism and female independence was undermining women's gender identity and that it was either the cause or the symptom of a bankrupted heterosexual desire. In 1872, for instance, she warned in her article 'The Epicene Sex' that independent women were becoming indifferent to the (implicitly sexual) attention of men, and claimed that these women were of 'doubtful gender' and, by inference, of corrupted morals. [102] Once again she suggested that, in attempting to rival men, women had effectively renounced their

[98] Linton, 'Emancipated Women', pp. 42-43.
[99] Linton, 'Emancipated Women', p. 41.
[100] Linton, 'Emancipated Women', p. 47.
[101] Linton, 'Emancipated Women', pp.43, 42, 41.
[102] Linton, 'The Epicene Sex' in the *Saturday Review*, 24 August 1872, pp. 242-243, p. 243.

'special [feminine] graces' in favour of 'the coarser passions and instincts of men'.[103] Three years later Linton reiterated this claim by arguing that the ambitious and career minded 'modern woman', who sought to breach the boundaries of gender segregation in education and the workplace, was of an 'indeterminate third sex'.[104] Society, she warned, was witnessing the emergence of a species of 'men-women' who united only the worst traits of each gender.[105] Whilst retaining what she considered to be the specifically feminine defects of weakness, irrationality, and hysteria, these 'hybrids', Linton claimed, only succeeded in their attempts to establish gender equality by replicating men's 'rough-hewn licence and abandonment of inconvenient delicacy'.[106] In this later article, however, Linton warned that the inevitable intermingling of the sexes brought about by female intervention into traditionally exclusive masculine spheres would not only result in some women becoming atavistic separatists but would also incite 'increased licence' in other women who, like the advocates of the "free love" movement, would demand greater sexual autonomy and (foreshadowing Bell Blount) the right to disaffirm the legal bonds of marriage. '[I]t is impossible' Linton argued, 'that girls brought up in boys' schools, and young women associated with men in their work, should remain such as they are now. They must of necessity develope [*sic*] into Victoria Woodhulls, or into moral and social amazons'.[107]

Whilst in these essays Linton makes no explicit correlation between feminism and lesbianism, her articles nevertheless offer portraits that presuppose her later depiction of Bell. In fact, as a misanderous, woman loving man-woman who

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[103] Linton, 'The Epicene Sex', p. 243.
[104] Linton, 'Woman's Place in Nature and Society' in *Belgravia*, May 1876, pp. 349-363, p. 353.
[105] Linton, 'Woman's Place in Nature and Society', p. 349.
[106] Linton, 'Woman's Place in Nature and Society', pp.361, 349.
[107] Linton, 'Woman's Place in Nature and Society', p. 354. Victoria Woodhull was a controversial leading figure of the American women's suffrage movement. Nominated in 1872 by the Equal Rights Party, Woodhull was the first female U.S. Presidential candidate. In addition to championing women's right to vote, her political manifesto also supported divorce, abortion and free love. In 1871 Woodhull asserted: 'I have an *inalienable*, *constitutional* and *natural* right to love whom I may, to love *as long* or as *short* a period as I can; to *change* that love *every day* if I please, and with *that* right neither *you* nor any *law* you can frame have *any* right to interfere'. Victoria Woodhull, '"And the truth shall make you free": A speech on the principles of social freedom, delivered in Steinway Hall', 20 November 1871 (New York: Woodhull, Claflin & Co., 1871), p. 23. Author's emphasis. Notably, the speech was condemned and Woodhull herself denounced as one of the 'wild women of the Western Continent' by the *Saturday Review* the following month. By contrast, the 'shrieking sisterhood at home' was declared to be rather 'tame'. Anonymous, 'A Free Love Heroine' in the *Saturday Review*, 9 December 1871, pp. 750-751, p. 750.

'vilified the maternal instinct as the most animal and degrading of all emotions', Bell can clearly be seen to correspond directly with Linton's earlier account of those feminists whom she argued had suddenly appeared during the 1850s (RF, p. 151). Although she was careful not to name any of these pioneering women, by historically identifying the mid-century as a point of origin for their collective activism Linton was undoubtedly alluding to some of those early campaigners who were associated with Cushman's Rome community and who, as both Marcus and Vicinus have noted, either lived in female couples or who, at some stage in their lives, were involved in close relationships with other women. One might include in Linton's reference, for instance, activists and campaigners Bessie Rayner Parkes and Barbara Leigh Smith. As co-founders of the Married Women's Property Committee in 1855, these two women were responsible for initiating and orchestrating a nationwide petition for reform to existing marital law which denied married women independent rights to their income and property. According to Vicinus, Parkes had not only established 'a series of passionate friendships with other feminists', including Hays, but 'had been so deeply involved with Barbara Leigh Smith that her father worried about whether she would ever marry'. [108]

Linton's specific claim, however, that some of those in the vanguard of the feminist movement were both 'unmarried' and 'epicene-looking women' brings more immediately to mind figures such as Frances Power Cobbe or Emily Faithfull, that latter of whom collaborated with Parkes in the foundation of the Society for Promoting the Employment for Women in 1859, and a year later established the *Victoria Press* which trained and employed women as compositors. Notably, both Cobbe and Faithfull lived in long-term relationships with other women and were regarded as being rather unorthodox by some of their contemporaries. In her memoirs Constance Battersea, for instance, remembered that Cobbe, 'with her shortcut hair, jacket and skirt, bade defiance to all regulation of evening dress'.[109] Similarly, Faithfull was posthumously described by Mrs Fenwick Miller in the *Woman's Signal* as having deliberately cultivated a masculine appearance. Fenwick's portrait was subsequently repudiated by Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy. Yet, as Vicinus demonstrates in her study, an undated photograph (circa 1875) which portrays Faithfull with short, combed back hair and dressed in a shirt and

[108] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, pp. 34, 71.
[109] Constance Battersea, *Reminiscences* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1921), p. 256.

jacket suggests that Fenwick's representation of Faithfull was accurate. Arguably, given Bell's attempts to maintain her feminine appearance these figures can be discounted. Bell's attempts to assert her femininess, however, are mocked by Linton's narrator who implies that Bell is perhaps innately more of a man than she is a woman. 'Mrs. Blount', we are told, 'had a certain flourish of masculinity about her that made a cigarette between her full hard lips infinitely more natural than a knitting-needle in her hand' (RF, p. 143).

Any attempt, however, to identify the origins of Linton's journalistic accounts of pseudo-masculine feminists with her subsequent derogatory portrait of Bell, should acknowledge that such depictions are also likely to have been informed by some of those women with whom Linton had been directly acquainted when in London during the early 1850s; at which time she had been an enthusiastic member of Samuel Laurence's avant-garde circle of writers, intellectuals and political reformers.[110] In particular, it was through her affiliation with Laurence's bohemian community that Linton not only met Cushman but also became acquainted with Cushman's long-term partner Matilda Hays, who was to become co-editor of the *English Woman's Journal* with Parkes in 1858. That Marcus's reading of *The Rebel* overlooks Linton's earlier familiarity with these figures, as well as Linton's previous journalism, is somewhat surprising given the compelling arguments made in *Between Women* regarding the correlation between female marriage and mid-Victorian feminism. Indeed, whilst Vicinus has noted that early 'feminism was associated with close female friendships', Marcus has persuasively demonstrated that the mid-century campaigns for reform (in particular those laws relating to divorce and married women's property rights) were significantly influenced by feminists who lived in female couples, some of whom were closely associated with Cushman's Rome community.[111] Marcus, for instance, draws particular attention to Hays and Cushman's relationship suggesting that both these women understood their female marriage 'in terms of a basic contract' which, when breached by Cushman's involvement with Stebbins, resulted in Hays demanding and receiving substantial compensation or 'alimony' for having 'sacrificed a literary career to

[110] According to Anderson, Linton had come to know Laurence when he had visited Keswick and painted her portrait, *Woman Against Women*, p. 39.

[111] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. 71. Vicinus notes, for instance, that through her collaboration in founding the 'Society for Promoting the Employment of Women' with Bessie Rayner Parkes, Emily Faithful was also introduced to Matilda Hays.

follow Cushman to Italy' (BW, p. 206). Although Marcus acknowledges that Hays had been an active feminist prior to her relationship with Cushman, she nevertheless argues that this relationship compounded Hays's continued advocacy for divorce to be made more available to those legally bound in heterosexual marriage. Marcus also suggests that Cobbe was another feminist who patterned her female marriage 'on a contractual ideal' and recommended that 'legal [heterosexual] marriage remodel itself' on similar terms (BW, p. 211). Moreover, the impact of Cobbe's feminist activity upon subsequent reform to marriage legislation, Marcus suggests, not only provides 'evidence of the influence that [the paradigm of] female marriage had on the changing forms' of heterosexual marriage but also testifies to the fact that her own relationship with Mary Lloyd was socially legitimated: 'Through her writings and her professional and personal connections', Marcus claims, 'Cobbe was able to shape legislation and policy. […] Cobbe achieved all of this while living openly with another woman in a relationship that she and others perceived to be modelled on marriage' (BW, p. 211). Unfortunately, Marcus fails to apply these insights to her subsequent reading of Linton's novel.

Friendship versus Sisterhood

In her biography of Linton Anderson draws attention to the fact that Linton's closest family bond was with her sister Lucy, who was just eighteen months older than Eliza. Although especially beloved by all the members of the (motherless) Lynn family, Lucy was the particular object of Linton's 'fanatical devotion'.[112] Frequently the idealized subject of the poetry that Linton wrote during her youth, Lucy continued to elicit a compelling attraction for the author in later life. In a letter written in 1869 Linton described Lucy as her 'dearest love […] whom, as a girl, I had worshipped and who has still the old magnetic influence over me'.[113] Linton's ardent affection for her sister, however, appears to have seldom been fully reciprocated during their youth and, according to Linton, seems to have been exploited by Lucy. Responding with 'coldness' to her younger sister's devotion, Lucy would 'lord it over me', Linton claimed, 'with that tremendous force which

[112] Linton, *Christopher Kirkland*, p. 48.
[113] Linton, Letter to Mrs White Cooper, 15 September 1869, quoted in Anderson, *Woman Against Women*, p. 113.

weakness ever has over loving strength'.[114] Although she excuses her sister's 'indifference' as being a 'natural' response to her own overtly 'passionate' nature Linton nevertheless regards her relationship with Lucy as a significant prelude to future romantic encounters that ended in disappointment: 'It was a preface[…] the first of the many times', she declared, 'when I should make a shipwreck of my peace through love'.[115]

Linton's own ardent affection for Lucy, however, was not devoid of antagonism or resentment. Although her father's favouritism for Lucy was the source of 'heartbreak' it was the arrival into the family's social circle of the wealthy and sophisticated couple Mr. and Mrs. Darymple that provoked Linton's pernicious jealousy towards her sister. Whilst it appears from Linton's autobiography that the Darymples were 'loved' by all of her siblings, Linton herself developed an intense infatuation for the urbane Adeline Darymple. Adeline, Linton claimed, was 'the most exquisite creature under heaven'.[116] To be near her, she declared, 'was ecstasy, but to be away from her was torture'.[117] For Vicinus, Linton's account of her passionate devotion to Mrs. Darymple is significant because it evidences an expression of what Vicinus believes was Linton's hitherto suppressed homosexuality. However, this episode in Linton's life is as equally important for its depiction of how Linton negotiated a complex devotion to her sister as it is for Linton's '[h]omoerotic passion' for an older woman.[118] When Mrs. Darymple expressed affection for Lucy, Linton became incensed with a loathing that was directed not only at her sister but also herself. Having previously 'gloried' in her difference from her 'delicate' and 'beautiful' sister, Linton now 'hated' Lucy 'for what [she] was' but confessed: 'I hated myself much more in that I was not like [her]'.[119] However, when confronted with Lucy's anguish at her barely concealed 'jealous rage' Linton reinstates difference by resuming her subjugated and self-negating position within the sororal dyad: 'I was conquered', Linton claims, '[she] was my first care, and I would give [her] even Mrs. Darymple's preference. I would give [her], if need be, my life!'.[120]

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[114] Linton, *Christopher Kirkland*, p. 48.
[115] Linton, *Christopher Kirkland*, p. 48.
[116] Linton, *Christopher Kirkland*, p. 92.
[117] Linton, *Christopher Kirkland*, p. 103.
[118] Vicinus, *Intimate Friends*, p. 165.
[119] Linton, *Christopher Kirkland*, pp.47, 96.
[120] Linton, *Christopher Kirkland*, pp. 96-97

When read in terms of Marcus's claims regarding the middle-class Victorian ideals of 'compulsory homosociality and homoeroticism' for women, Linton's account appears to foreground a close association between sisterhood and elective mainstream female bonding. Linton's apparent willingness, for instance, to surrender the monopoly of Mrs Darymple's affection to Lucy might, to a certain degree, be seen to echo Marcus's claims regarding female amity and the marriage plot in novels. According to Marcus, in the interest of both female amity and companionate heterosexual marriage, female bonds were consolidated through the altruistic exchange or gift of a man from one woman to another. In addition, Marcus has also argued that whilst Victorian gender discourse discouraged women from competing for men, it did however, provide 'a sanctioned realm of erotic choice [and] agency' in which women could contend with one another for the attention of other women 'often singled out for being beautiful and socially in demand' (BW, pp. 62, 59). One might therefore suggest that Linton's retrospective account of her relationship with Lucy is emulative of the cultural ideals concerning same-sex female friendship identified in Marcus's study. However, in the subsequent section of this chapter it is argued that Marcus's reading of culturally endorsed elective female homosocial desire is more applicable to a Victorian understanding of sisterhood. That is to say, that Victorians acknowledged the enactment of aggressive homoerotic desire as an integral component of sororal bonding and that the model of sisterhood, rather than female friendship, was considered as the primary relationship between women through which female bonds could be consolidated and heterosexual marriage promoted.

In order to support these claims, the following discussion draws upon the work of Helena Michie whose study of literal and metaphoric sisterhood provides a valuable framework with which to explore further some of the issues raised by Marcus's compelling analysis of middle-class Victorian women's same-sex bonding. In particular, Michie not only claims that Victorians regarded sisterhood as fundamentally representative of the broader context of relations between women, but also argues that sisterhood was culturally constructed (most notably in literary texts) as a familiar and familial space of female difference in which expressions of anger, rivalry, and sexuality could be safely articulated. In her own study, Marcus makes a similar suggestion regarding the relationship between Victorian mothers

and daughters, arguing that during the second half of the nineteenth century women's fashion journals and magazines discursively eroticized this bond by depicting mainstream (desirable) femininity in terms of female aggression and objectification. However, whilst acknowledging the work of Foucault and claiming that the 'mother-daughter axis was as subject to eroticization as any other aspect of family life', Marcus offers a somewhat limited consideration of the significance afforded to the relationship of sisters (BW, p. 199). She notes, for instance, that frequent analogies were made between the bonds of friendship and sisters, and admits that certain writers like Christina Rossetti and Sarah Ellis considered the occurrence of close affection between sisters as the culmination of true friendship. Marcus also draws on the evidence of women's lifewriting to highlight how contemporary analogies of friendship and sisters were sometimes consolidated through 'concrete interactions' that joined friends to kin. Marcus cites, for example, Ann Gilbert's account of the integration of friendship and sisterhood whereby 'Gilbert wrote of befriending a pair of sisters with her own sister […] and of another friend's daughter becoming her sister's "friend and correspondent"' (BW, p. 70). In addition, Marcus briefly notes the means by which marriage could generate friendships that were also legally sanctioned bonds of sisterhood. She observes, for instance, that 'Hannah Allen's "dearest friend" became her sister-in-law when she married Hannah's brother-in-law' and that Charlotte Yonge expressed enthusiastic affection for her brother's new wife (BW, p. 70). It could be highlighted here, too, that Charlotte Yonge also formed a domestic bond of companionship with her brother's invalid sister-in-law, Gertrude Walter, who lived with the author from 1873 until she died in 1897. Despite the restrictions to Yonge's broader social life incurred by Miss Walter's presence, their relationship appears to have been close. Yonge's biographer, Christabel Coleridge claimed that the two women became 'warmly attached' to one another and that Gertrude's efforts in assisting Charlotte with her literary work 'were repaid with the tenderest devotion'.[121] Moreover, according to Coleridge, Gertrude even light-heartedly referred to herself as 'Char's wife' because of her role as 'helpmeet in her work'.[122]

[121] Christabel Coleridge, *Charlotte Mary Yonge: Her Life and Letters* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1903), pp. 270-271.
[122] Coleridge, *Charlotte Mary Yonge*, p. 270.

Thus Marcus draws attention to the important fact that biological sisters were culturally conceived of as the ultimate paradigm for women's friendships with one another and, at times, were directly assimilated into shared bonds of female amity. Marcus's brief discussion also alerts us to the fact that sisterhood and friendship could also become integrated through marriage, whereby a priori friends became sisters (in-law) or vice versa. Yet whilst highlighting the close links that were either conceived or experienced as existing between elective female friendship and sisterhood, Marcus's study stops short of providing the level of analysis given over to female amity. For example, Marcus convincingly demonstrates that both Victorian lifewriting and fiction reveal that many ardent bonds of female amity provided the impetus for a companionate heterosexual marriage that subsequently sustained those bonds of female friendship. Yet, other than a brief reference to the aforementioned Hannah Allen and Charlotte Yonge, little attention is given to the potential significance that a transformation from female friendship to (a legalized bond of) sisterhood may have had for some women. One might recall here Flannery's perceptive analysis of Vicinus's reading of Anne Lister's relationships with Mariane Belcombe and her sisters. As Flannery suggested, in keeping with the prevalent tendency of other queer theorists and scholars of sexuality, Vicinus failed to recognize the full implications of her analysis by implicitly evoking, yet subsequently repudiating the trope of sisterhood as an enabling site in the production of queer desire. A similar claim might also be made about Marcus's study. In a more recent study, however, which itself draws on the work of Marcus (as well as Eve Sedgwick), Holly Furneaux has demonstrated how, during the nineteenth-century, 'in-lawing' functioned as a highly effective 'strategy' for consolidating an erotic attachment between two same-sex friends, albeit male.[123] Like Marcus, Furneaux's principal endeavour is to demonstrate the continuities that existed between homo- and heterosexual bonding in the Victorian era. Central to Furneaux's argument, which is based on readings of Victorian gender discourses relating to siblinghood, biographies, and the fiction of Charles Dickens, is the displacement of what she defines as the 'pervasive current logic that posits heterosexuality as the primary determinant of, or central motive for, family formation'.[124] Rather than

[123] Holly Furneaux, *Queer Dickens: Erotics, Families, Masculinities* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 107.
[124] Furneaux, *Queer Dickens*, p. 107.

understanding marriage and family in terms related solely to heterosexual desire and/or procreation, Dickens, as well as some of his contemporaries, Furneaux argues, actively sought to construct authentic, as well as fictional families that reinforced and maintained (homo)erotic bonds through the triadic relationship of a sister, her brother, and his closest friend whose attention is redirected and/or extended to that sister.[125] Dickens's fiction in particular, Furneaux suggests, repeatedly dramatized the homoerotic potentials of 'in-lawing' by drawing upon two principal Victorian beliefs about siblinghood which, despite gender difference, emphasized the physical likeness and parallels of character between opposite-sex siblings. Although Furneaux suggests that cultural beliefs about the physical resemblance of a brother and sister may have been overdetermined, these beliefs, she claims, were nevertheless compounded by a sororal ideology that facilitated the means by which the experience of homoerotic desire could be sustained. That is to say, prompted by conduct literature and fiction to subordinate her own interests and wishes to those of her brother's, an ideal sister was effectively impelled to identify her brother's desires as her own. As Furneaux observes, the potential for marital coercion is laid bare in an ideology that invests a brother with the power to veto a sister's choice of husband whilst substituting one of his own approval. These '[d]omestic ideologies of siblinghood', Furneaux claims, 'allowed both fictional men and their historical counterparts to create a homoerotically motivated family of choice through betrothal to the suggestively similar sister of their closest male friend'.[126] Whilst it is the triad of Bob Sawyer, Ben Allen and his sister Arabella, in Dickens's first novel *The Pickwick Papers* that overtly delineates Dickens's awareness of the 'homoerotic possibilities of in-lawing' (albeit unsuccessful) by drawing upon social ideals of sororal subordination, it was in later novels that he further explored similar erotic possibilities through his use of cultural beliefs regarding sibling resemblance.[127] Furneaux directs attention, for instance, to the carefully choreographed correspondences between Nicholas and his sister, Kate, in Dickens's later novel *Nicholas Nickleby*, suggesting that Smike's attraction to Kate

[125] Furneaux suggests that the: 'intended marital triangle of [Alfred] Tennyson (Dickens's most beloved poet) and his closest friend, [Arthur] Hallam, who was affianced to Tennyson's favourite sister, Emily, is perhaps the best known actual example of such a triadic relationship', *Queer Dickens*, p. 113.
[126] Furneaux, *Queer Dickens*, p. 109.
[127] Furneaux, *Queer Dickens*, p. 124.

had already been anticipated and well rehearsed through his physical admiration for Nicholas. In a novel which Furneaux claims makes a 'considerable investment in a wider cultural expectation of sibling parity', and which, she notes, included identical same-sex twins, the Cheeryble brothers, Smike is able to articulate his desire for Nicholas through the enabling figure of the sister.[128]

Whilst Furneaux's arguments are principally concerned with exploring the indirect (or redirected) expression of male homoerotic desire through 'legally enshrined brotherhood' she nevertheless suggests that a parallel concept was at times applicable to the structuring of female friends.[129] Drawing upon Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's social history of the Victorian era, Furneaux directs attention to the significance of their discussion of Rebecca Solly, whose deeply held desire 'that her best friend would become her "sister"' was eventually realized when that friend married one of Rebecca's elder brothers.[130] Similarly, according to Furneaux, the advantages of being able to maintain control over and safeguard the continuity of friendship through the process of in-lawing were not lost on either Ellen Nussey or Charlotte Brontë. Whilst '[s]uch motives certainly informed Ellen Nussey's instigation of her brother's proposal to her particular friend', Furneaux argues, Brontë, despite her refusal to marry, nevertheless revealed to Nussey her own acknowledgement of the desirability of such an arrangement: 'Now my dear Ellen there were in this proposal some things that might have proved a strong temptation - I thought if I were to marry so, Ellen could live with me and how happy I should be'.[131]

In what might be termed her own fictional portrait of strategic sister 'in-lawing' in *The Rebel of the Family*, Linton foregrounds the combined desire for personal independence and authenticated gentility as being the prime motives for Clarissa Merton's willingness to promote her brother's marriage. Nevertheless she hints at the potential homoerotic desire underlying Mrs Merton's particular wish that her brother marry Thomasina. In the first instance Clarissa approves of Mr

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[128] Furneaux, *Queer Dickens*, p. 129.
[129] Furneaux, *Queer Dickens*, p. 131.
[130] Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 221, quoted in Furneaux, *Queer Dickens*, p. 121.
[131] Furneaux, 'Charles Dickens's Families of Choice', pp. 173; Charlotte Brontë, letter to Ellen Nussey, 12 March 1839 in *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë with a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends*, ed. Margaret Smith, 3 Vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995-2004), Vol. I, p.187, quoted in Furneaux, *Queer Dickens*, p. 121.

Brocklebank marrying ‘any nice-looking, well-dressed girl’ because it would free her from the burden of his unwelcome companionship, but his marriage to one of the Winstanley sisters was nevertheless particularly beneficial in consolidating her own social status (RF, p. 39). As the widow of a successful city tradesman Clarissa’s material wealth and financial independence was assured. Yet, as Linton’s narrator explains, Clarissa ‘had sense enough to be conscious’ that, unlike the Winstanleys, she did not possess ‘the delicate good-breeding which comes from inheritance’ (RF, p. 91). Hence, Clarissa was keen to ‘cultivate’ their friendship ‘for her own sake as well as her brother’s’ (RF, p. 91). However, whilst her brother’s marriage to any of the three Winstanley sisters would provide Clarissa with the means by which to fulfil both of her aspirations, she nevertheless ‘actively wished him to marry Thomasina’ (RF, p. 74). Ostensibly Mrs Merton’s justification of sibling choice is a practical recognition that, of the three, only the ‘placid’ Thomasina could become a suitably tractable or ‘harmonious wife’ to Mr Brocklebank (RF, p. 74). Eva, despite her charm, would become ‘a thorny little rosebud’ whilst his marriage to Perdita would be almost catastrophic. As a ‘democratic […] wife of a rich manufacturer’ Perdita, Mrs Merton calculated, would bring about ‘a local revolution’ (RF, p. 74). Underlying Clarissa’s pragmatism, however, is a suggestion of her own predilection for attractive young women, as is perhaps evidenced in her earlier approval of her brother’s interest in ‘any nice-looking’ girl. That she considers as particularly disagreeable the prospect of having Perdita as a sister-in-law (whom, she argued, had ‘no points to make the best of’) is therefore not surprising (RF, p. 363). Even the suggestion that she might be asked to chaperone ‘a dowdy or a fright’ was, Linton’s narrator implies, something Clarissa would have been barely able to endure (RF, p. 39). Conversely, however, Clarissa confesses that Thomasina was ‘good to look at’ and rather unique amongst all of her brother’s (previous) ‘fancies’ because ‘the most congenial to Mrs Merton’ (RF p. 39). So much so, that she becomes determined to protect and promote what she knew to be Thomasina’s mercenary interest in her brother. Any deviation in Mr Brocklebank’s romantic interest in this sister would be tacitly, but firmly opposed:

> surely it would be Thomasina! […]. All this however, was only thought, not said; and no one could have seen by Clarissa's eyes, voice or ways, […] that she was taking stock of all that was about her, and thinking what she could do to put her invisible little spoke into the wheel, should it turn in the direction which she did not wish to see it take (RF, p. 75).

Linton's depiction of Mrs Merton's determined endeavours to specifically facilitate and secure Thomasina's marriage to Mr Brocklebank suggest that the author was not only fully conversant with the strategies of 'sister-in-lawing', but also demonstrates her engagement with 'the plot of female amity' outlined in Marcus's study. Linton's portrait, however, of Mrs Merton's gift of Mr Brocklebank to Thomasina inverts the underlying principles of feminine altruism and self-denial in the marriage plot of female friendship. In this instance, the exchange that takes place relates to a man whose companionship neither woman really desires. For Mrs Merton, the marriage of her brother secures her own 'liberty' from his onerous presence (RF, p. 39). Conversely, it is through marriage *to* Mr Brocklebank that feminine duties of sacrifice are enacted. That is, for Thomasina, marriage to Mr Brocklebank is 'self-immolation', primarily conducted to secure the financial and social status of her beloved and mercenary mother (RF, p. 389).

Whilst Marcus has drawn attention to the widespread prevalence of the interactions of kin, marriage and friends, her study nevertheless fails to provide any detailed discussion of the relationship between sisters and female friendship other than to suggest that Victorians did not regard as inevitable an affinity between sisterhood and female friendship.[132] A somewhat 'circumspect' Ellis, recognizing that 'sisters were not always friends', Marcus argues, 'assum[ed] a distinction between the two relationships that meant they could approximate one another only under the right conditions' (BW, p. 69). However, what exactly Ellis or other Victorians may have believed constituted the appropriate conditions for sororal amity to flourish or how they differentiated between the relationships of female friends and sisters is absent from Marcus's study. Yet the omission of any detailed analysis of contemporary constructions of sisterhood leads Marcus to overstate the

[132] In her brief discussion of Ellis's comparison of female friendship and sisterhood Marcus draws attention to Ellis's claim that: 'there may be faithful friends formed in after years; but when a sister is a sister's friend, there can be none so tender, and … so true', Ellis, *The Women of England*, p. 230, quoted in Marcus, *Between Women*, p. 69.

importance of female amity and to overlook the cultural significance attributed to sisterhood. For example, in addition to her claim that a close affection between sisters surpassed the amity of latterly formed extra-familial female friendships, Sarah Ellis also suggested that there were instances of sororal intimacy that transcended all other ties of friendship: 'there is sometimes a bond existing between sisters, the most endearing, the most pure and disinterested, of any description of affection which this world affords'.[133] Later in the century, in his compendium *The Friendships of Women* (1879), William Alger described amity between sisters as an 'unspeakably important class of womanly friendships' that was sufficiently commonplace as to escape particular notice.[134] Whilst a combination of domestic seclusion and a reluctance to publicize friendship overtly resulted in an absence of marked observation, 'multitudes of sisters', he argued, 'thrown into constant intimacy […] must become ardent friends'.[135] Charlotte Yonge, like Sarah Ellis, was perhaps less optimistic than Alger about the widespread existence of friendship between sisters, noting that it was 'not universal', but she nevertheless regarded this bond as the foremost manifestation of female amity. In a chapter devoted to the bonds of female friendship in her volume of essays, *Womankind* (1876), Yonge's opening discussion briefly glides into a comparative appraisal of friendship and sisterhood which consigns upon the former bond a compensatory status:

> where sisters are nearly of the same age, and of dispositions that *fit* into one another, they do not want external friends; […] but this is not universal, and often while one pair of sisters hang together, sufficing one another, and quite inseparable, another girl in the same family is left to solace herself with a friend, and would be forlorn without her.[136]

That Yonge considered similarity (in this instance, of age) as being conducive to the friendship of sisters will be discussed further on. For the purposes of the discussion thus far, however, it is important to note that in the passage quoted above Yonge constructs sisterhood as a potentially self-sufficient and, to some degree, self-elected dyad of female amity whilst depicting "external" bonds of female friendship as a peripheral consolation for those unfortunate enough to have been denied (or

[133] Ellis, *The Women of England*, p. 224.
[134] William Rounseville Alger, *The Friendship of Women* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1879), p. 263.
[135] Alger, *The Friendships of Women*, p. 263.
[136] Yonge, *Womankind*, p. 145. Yonge's emphasis.

excluded from) the opportunity of developing a friendship with another sister. According to Yonge, therefore, female friendship was representative of surrogate sisterhood.

Conversely, however, Marcus argues that despite favourable analogies to familial bonds, including sisters, female friendship had a 'unique position' in Victorian society because it was 'a form of love perceived as moral, uplifting, and genuine even though – or *because* - it entailed few of the material entanglements and responsibilities attached to middle-class family life'(BW, p. 69; Marcus's emphasis). Marcus also suggests elsewhere in her study that female friendship was particularly cherished because it provided the opportunity to form intimate relationships outside of the family which were based on choice and defined in terms of exclusivity. Unlike the 'assigned' biological bonds within the family, friendship, Marcus claims, was 'for many girls their first experience of an affinity elected' and, for those women who grew up in large families, 'a girl's first experience of a dyad rather than a swarm'(BW, p. 56). Of particular significance to Marcus's revisionary reading of elective female bonding is her claim that women of all ages could, with complete impunity, 'relish' competing with one another for the particular attention and interest of another woman without transgressing the boundaries of culturally endorsed femininity (BW, p. 59). Both in 'maturity as in youth' middle-class women could, according to Marcus, 'enjoy, without guilt, the pleasures of toying with another woman's affections or vying with other women for precedence of a friend' (BW, p. 59). Marcus notes, for instance, that in their correspondence with one another some women 'boasted' about their successes in having deposed others in exclusively ardent female friendships. Thus, Marcus's definition of female friendship is one in which sentimental bonds between women, exempt from the 'instrumental relationships' within the family, coexisted with more aggressive same-sex relationships premised on rivalry which, as one might reasonably suppose, resulted in or were designed to generate jealousy, if not outright hostility.

Recourse, however, to Linton's depiction of Perdita and Mary Chesterton's relationship in *The Rebel*, and previous contemporary commentary (including Linton's), suggest that the same-sex eroticism of elective female bonds outlined in Marcus's study was not universally endorsed by Victorians. It can certainly be argued that contemporaries regarded what is now defined as homoeroticism to be a

significant dynamic of Victorian women's elected relationships with other women, but this aspect of their relationships is highlighted as being antithetical to middle-class female bonding. The anonymous author of etiquette manual *The Ladies' Vase* (1849), for example, claimed that there were some young women who regarded the culmination of friendship in terms of a hostile and exclusionary dyad. According to the author, such young women believed that testimony to the 'absolute unity' of their friendship was evidenced in their active contempt for other women. These women, the author argued, thought 'it would be a less[er] crime to worship two gods than to love two friends! Therefore, to bring it to perfection, it was necessary that all beside should be despised and disregarded'.[137] Other young women, according to the author, apparently regarded female friendship as being predominantly founded upon 'jealousy' and the mutual cultivation of resentment and indignation. '[E]very seeming slight', it would appear, was to be looked for in order to facilitate the 'indescribable torment of either party'.[138] Such descriptions of jealousy and rivalry, however, were consistent only with a perception that women's relationships with one another were somewhat dysfunctional and female friendship an uncommon occurrence, and not, as Marcus might argue, indicative of a culturally sanctioned female homoeroticism. As Martha Vicinus has noted, whilst conducting research for his widely popular *The Friendships of Women*, William Alger confessed his surprise at 'the small number of recorded examples of sentiment between women […] and by the commonness of the expressed belief, that strong natural obstacles make friendship a comparatively feeble and rare experience with them'.[139] Notably, Charlotte Yonge expressed a belief that, with the exception of sisters, 'women get on more easily with men than women'.[140] Moreover, as Helena Michie has observed, Yonge considered hostility to be noticeably less prevalent between sisters than it was amongst young women who were not related. 'Spite and jealousy', Yonge argued, 'are dangers among girls thrown together without relationship […]. Such things do prevail among sisters, but less commonly'.[141] It should, however, be

[137] An American Lady, *The Ladies' Vase; Or, Polite Manual For Young Ladies*' (Hartford: H. S. Parsons & Co., 1849), p. 22.
[138] An American Lady, *The Ladies' Vase*, p. 22.
[139] Alger, *The Friendships of Women*, p. vii.
[140] Yonge, *Womankind*, p. 141.
[141] Yonge, *Womankind*, p. 27, quoted in Michie, *Sororophobia*, p. 25.

noted that Yonge's own siblings consisted of an only brother and therefore her analysis of sisters is not derived from any personal experience.

Perhaps not unsurprisingly, given her work for the *Saturday Review* as a fierce critic of women and women writers, and her willingness to participate in the editor, John Douglas Cook's 'deliberate plan to set woman against woman,' Linton was equally pessimistic about the prevalence of female amity.[142] In her article 'Feminine Amenities', for instance, which first appeared in the weekly journal and was republished fifteen years later in her collection of 'Girl of the Period' essays, Linton presented a particularly bleak account of women's relationships with one another.[143] 'Women', she announced, were 'always more or less antagonistic to each other' because, she argued, being innately prone to exaggerate differences amongst themselves, women lacked the ability to experience empathy or express benevolence to one another. [144] Whilst indifferent to the needs of their 'weak[er] sisters', Linton claimed, women held their more (intellectually) gifted peers in 'contempt'.[145] Although Linton attributes women's dysfunctional homosociality to the instinctive 'feminine characteristic' of exaggeration, she also implies that cultural ideals of femininity and class which, for many middle and upper middle-class women, she suggested, coexisted in a narrow preoccupation with the 'trifles' of fashion and etiquette, also generated ill-feeling between women.[146] In what appears to offer a direct contradiction to Marcus's claim that fashion and desirable femininity represented a culturally sanctioned realm for the expression of female homoerotic objectification, aggression and rivalry, Linton's article depicts fashion as a metaphorical battlefield upon which women tacitly engaged in bitter 'feminine war-fare'.[147] In fact Linton argues that both fashion and the female gaze it solicited were two of the most effective weapons in a feminine arsenal deployed to maintain subtle class distinctions. '[M]ost women passionately care for dress' and are '[a]shamed to be unfashionable', she suggested, because 'their toilet is one of their most vulnerable

[142] Scott, *The Drama of Yesterday and Today*. Vol. I, p. 422, quoted in Anderson, *Woman Against Women*, p. 119.
[143] 'Feminine Amenities' was first published in the *Saturday Review* journal, 5 December 1868, and later included in a compendium of Linton's *Saturday Review* articles, *The Girl of the Period, and other Social Essays*, 2 Vols. (London: Bentley & Sons, 1883), Vol. I, pp. 184-192.
[144] Eliza Lynn Linton, 'Feminine Amenities' in *The Girl of the Period*, p. 184.
[145] Linton,' Feminine Amenities', p. 184.
[146] Linton, 'Feminine Amenities', pp.185, 189.
[147] Linton, 'Feminine Amenities', p. 186.

parts'.[148] Conscientious observation of current tastes, she contended, had therefore become absolutely crucial to a woman's (homo)social survival. Whilst, in this essay, women are condemned by Linton for their anxious obsession with dress, in *The Rebel of Family* Linton ironically uses this concept as the unwitting justification for Mrs Winstanley to prohibit Perdita's friendship with the predatory lesbian Bell Blount. Described by Linton's narrator as someone whose dress, though 'expensive', 'had the look of a dummy in a third-rate shop-window', Bell is instantly reviled by Perdita's mother (RF, p. 49). For Mrs Winstanley, Bell's 'kaleidoscopic' attire blatantly registers as distinct class difference (as well as Bell's questionable sanity) (RF, p. 49). She is 'simply a vulgar oddity' whose society is eminently 'degrading', she tells Perdita (RF, p. 277). For Linton's readers, though, Mrs Blount's 'barbarous' taste in fashion would have been a highly conspicuous signifier of her radical deviation from mainstream middle-class heteronormative femininity (RF, p. 277).

In the more conventional portraits of her essay, however, Linton had suggested that it was women from the aspirant middle classes who were chiefly singled out as targets for the condescension of their social superiors. Notably, according to Linton's account, class hostility was specifically gendered. Whereas a successful middle-class husband was somewhat immune from the antipathy of the more elite sectors of (feminine) society, and was on occasions 'adored by fashionable women', his wife, Linton claimed, was only 'tolerated for his sake'.[149] Although only begrudgingly accommodated, however, the unwelcome middle-class wife was nevertheless subjected to a close scrutinization that led to spiteful innuendo, made all the more cruel because knowingly masqueraded as gracious feminine admiration:

[148] Linton, 'Feminine Amenities', p. 187.
[149] Linton, 'Feminine Amenities', p. 188.

> They know every turn and twist that can humiliate her if she has pretensions which they choose to demolish. They praise her toilet for its good taste in simplicity, when she thinks she is one of the finest on an occasion on which no one can be too fine. They tell her that the pattern of hers is perfect, and made just like the duchess's famous dress last season, when she believes that she has Madame Josephine's last, freshly imported from Paris.[150]

To a certain extent Linton's comments should be read within the context of the misogynistic agenda of the *Saturday Review*, in which her article first appeared. Yet Linton was not alone in claiming that inter-related issues of fashion and class were disruptive elements in women's same-sex relationships. Earlier in the century, for instance, Sarah Ellis lamented 'the almost unrivalled power of fashion upon the female mind' and suggested, like Linton, that women's forensic interest in one another's dress was allied to determining 'the precise grade of [their] gentility'.[151] Again, like Linton, Ellis had argued that women's fascination with the social semiotics of fashion frequently generated resentment and ill-feeling: 'there exists in connexion with the subject' she argued, 'a degree of rivalry and ambition which call forth many of the evil passions […], and mar the pleasant pictures of social life'.[152] For some prominent social commentators like Ellis and Linton, therefore, women's vested interest in fashion was considered a significant factor in their relationships with each other primarily because it was productive of a jealous scrutinization of class identity. Consequently, rather than endorsing the homoerotic dynamics of female bonding, engendered by fashion, as culturally permissible aspects of (desirable) mainstream femininity, Linton and Ellis condemned these social characteristics as the unwelcome manifestations of women's desire for and regulation against social mobility.

Linton, more than Ellis, however, depicts the keen scopophilic structuring of women's homosociality as a particularly menacing form of maintaining status within a social hierarchy which, she suggested, could be used to devastating effect. In her article, Linton transforms the potentially objectifying female gaze into an intimidating 'stare' that, ostensibly at least, transcends, without rupturing, the

[150] Linton, 'Feminine Amenities', p. 189.
[151] Ellis, *The Daughters of England*, p. 222; Ellis, *The Women of England*, p. 104.
[152] Ellis, *The Women of England*, p. 104.

cultural constraints of feminine etiquette.[153] Whilst gendered social conventions prohibited 'unladylike' vocalization of disharmony amongst women, 'the stare', Linton argued, enabled women to tacitly, yet openly, insult one another.[154] Rather than snub or 'cut' one another by means of straightforward disregard, women, Linton suggests, had become practised in the 'art' of a studied mode of 'obliviousness' that served, literally, to magnify another woman's apparent social insignificance:

> The unabashed serenity and unflinching constancy with which one woman can stare down another is in itself an art that requires a certain amount of natural genius, as well as careful cultivation. She puts up her eyeglass – not being shortsighted – and surveys the enemy standing two feet away from her, with a sublime contempt for her whole condition, or with a still more sublime ignoring of her sentient existence, that no words can give'.[155]

As *the* 'weapon' of choice for many mature and experienced women in society, the 'less seasoned' younger woman, Linton argued, had little or no defence from this assault, and was 'reduced to the most pitiable state of self-abasement'.[156] However, although Linton depicts this form of ocular aggression as the carefully cultivated and well-practised accomplishment of mature society women, she nevertheless considered its use to be symptomatic of an innate feminine misogyny. One only had to observe the introduction of two girls, she claimed, to note that "the stare" was 'one of the instinctive arms native to the sex' which, over a period of time, women would exercise against one another to 'deadly perfection'.[157]

When writing twenty-one years later for *The Universal Review* Linton offered a portrait of female homosociality that was markedly less hostile than the appraisal she gave for the *Saturday Review.* Yet Linton's evaluation of female same-sex bonds nevertheless remained somewhat pessimistic. In her 1889 article entitled 'The Ethics of Friendship', Linton argued that 'true friendship […] is one of the most precious, possessions of man[kind]' but her eulogy was severely undercut by

[153] Linton, 'Feminine Amenities', p. 186.
[154] Linton, 'Feminine Amenities', p. 185.
[155] Linton, 'Feminine Amenities', p. 186.
[156] Linton, 'Feminine Amenities', p. 186.
[157] Linton, 'Feminine Amenities', p. 186.

an insistence that it was also 'one of the rarest'.[158] Other than the historical exception of Lady Sarah Ponsonby and Eleanor Butler, there was a paucity of friendship between women she claimed. By some means or other, she argued, 'we have not got hold of the ideal' and 'perfect friendship, has not made much headway amongst us'.[159] Once again, one particular impediment to female friendship that Linton identified was that of social status. Whilst acknowledging that there were many 'romantic attachments' formed between young women in schools where class boundaries were less rigidly enforced, these relationships, she claimed, were doomed when women resumed their allotted social place outside of the egalitarian confines of school.[160] Although Linton conceded that there were occasional exceptions, these were nevertheless unusual. 'Society', she argued 'is more potent than human nature'.[161]

In *The Rebel of the Family*, however, Linton had previously explored the dilemmas posed by a conflict between the ideals of female amity and social conventions but in this instance appears to offer a portrait of one of those 'rare' occasions when amity triumphs over the constraints of 'classification'.[162] Namely, the reciprocal devotion that emerges between Perdita and her 'dearest friend' Mrs Crawford, who, much to Mrs. Winstanley's disgust, was the aunt of 'a man who keeps a shop' (RF, pp.177, 284). In this particular depiction of female amity Linton's novel provides a relatively persuasive argument against the restrictions that class identity placed upon elective female friendships. Despite, however, being demonstrable evidence of a commitment to democratic ideals, the implications of Perdita's relationship with the older Mrs Crawford are nonetheless somewhat more conventional than radical. Denied a fulfilling relationship with her own mother, whose 'maternal instinct', Linton's narrator implies, was at best 'stunted', Linton provides her heroine with a companion who represents a suitably conservative surrogate. Unlike Bell Blount and, to a lesser degree, Mary Chesterton, Mrs Crawford is not simply one of the very few companions that compensate Perdita for the dearth of female friendship within her own family but is specifically defined by

[158] Linton, 'The Ethics of Friendship', p. 347.
[159] Linton, 'The Ethics of Friendship', p. 332.
[160] Linton, 'The Ethics of Friendship', p. 335. Like Craik, Linton regards the romantic attachments of young (adolescent) women as legitimate precursors to the 'graver drama of [heterosexual] love', p. 335.
[161] Linton, 'The Ethics of Friendship', p. 335.
[162] Linton, 'The Ethics of Friendship', p. 335.

Linton's heroine as her 'mother-friend' whose example of 'quiet home-staying and essentially feminine life' served to temper the 'aberrations' of Perdita's 'vigorous nature' (RF, p. 177).

The apparent advocacy of egalitarian female homosociality is simultaneously complicated in Linton's depiction of Perdita's relationship with Mrs Blount who, in agreement with Mrs Winstanley, considered the Crawfords wholly unsuitable companions for a woman of Perdita's status. 'You are a little lady and they are only tradespeople. […] *We* must respect social degrees as we find them', she advised Linton's heroine (RF, p. 288; my emphasis). Bell's endorsement of carefully regulated class boundaries, which extended to the membership of her Woman's Rights movement, is somewhat disingenuous, however. Earlier in the novel, when introducing herself to Perdita, she had similarly claimed a parity of rank with Linton's heroine by suggesting that their 'social position [was] equal' (RF, p. 54). Yet, as Linton's narrative voice makes unequivocally clear in the opening paragraph of the novel, the Winstanley women were '[b]orn in the velvet' and, excepting Perdita, haughtily occupied the upper echelons of the middle-classes (RF, p. 23). As the estranged wife of a local vicar, Bell is several 'social degrees' below Perdita, the daughter of a major and granddaughter of a Bishop. Notably, Linton herself was acutely aware of the significance of this particular incarnation of social disparity between Perdita and Mrs Blount, which replicates that of her parents. As she explained in her autobiography, at the time of their marriage, Linton's father 'was a simple vicar', whilst Linton's mother was the daughter of a Dean who was later to become Bishop Goodenough.[163] The marriage was vehemently opposed by Linton's maternal family who, after the death of her grandfather, 'abandoned' the Lynns, compounding further the sense of isolation Linton experienced in the early part of her life.[164]

Unlike many of her contemporaries, including the Brontës, Linton and her siblings had no sympathetic aunt willing to undertake the maternal role of their late mother: 'we knew none of that kindly superintendence which the children of a dead sister so often receive from those still living'.[165] That, in Linton's novel, Bell emphasizes to Perdita the comparatively inferior social status of the Crawfords

[163] Linton, *Christopher Kirkland*, p. 38.
[164] Linton, *Christopher Kirkland*, p. 39. It was only after the death of his daughter that Linton's grandfather reconciled himself to her marriage.
[165] Linton, *Christopher Kirkland*, p. 39.

whilst conveniently overlooking that of her own only serves to augment further the hypocrisy of her misandrist politics. For instance, whilst vehemently proclaiming that the gendered hierarchy within heterosexual marriage was 'infinitely degrading' to women and one of the many manifestations of male tyranny and female oppression, Bell's relationship with her own 'little wife', Connie Tracy, nevertheless duplicates those terms of heterosexual matrimony she so zealously condemned (RF, pp.56, 54). Connie lived with Mrs Blount 'on terms of dependence and subserviency' and, despite outward appearances, was a 'slave in private' (RF, p. 56). As the *Saturday Review* noted, Linton's demonisation of Bell was very much in keeping with the periodical essays Linton had previously written attacking organised feminism and, as such, could simply be read as an effective means by which Linton attempted to maintain her antifeminist agenda within fiction.[166] Linton's characterisation of Mrs Blount, however, which is in stark contrast to Perdita's other, more traditional female companion, Mrs Crawford, also allows Linton to illustrate the dangers to which an unchecked idealized commitment to same-sex female amity exposes itself when transgressing the boundaries of social status. When Perdita's mother, for example, 'forbid[s]' Perdita from continuing an 'acquaintance' with Bell Blount whom, Mrs Winstanley had deemed 'unfit for the society of ladies', Perdita not only defends Bell but also justifies a preference for female companionship over that of Mr Brocklebank (RF, p. 277). Whilst genuinely fond of the wealthy ironmaster, Perdita nevertheless explains to her matchmaking mother that 'he is not my friend as a woman would be' (RF, p. 279). Linton demonstrates, however, that Perdita's unswerving loyalty to Mrs Blount is seriously misplaced and that her trust is misappropriated by Bell whose desire for Perdita exceeds friendship. Perdita's ingenuous commitment to female amity effectively results in a misinterpretation of Bell's 'stirring sophistries' and 'passionate' caresses, a misconception that instigates a potential threat to her ensuing heterosexual romance (RF, pp. 369, 292). Driven by her own sexual jealousy for Perdita, Bell betrays her by (ironically) appealing to Mrs Winstanley's snobbery in an attempt to bring about an end to the young rebel's blossoming relationship with the chemist Leslie Crawford.

[166] Linton's narrator literally demonizes Mrs Blount by likening her to the 'Prince of Darkness clad as an Angel of Light', *The Rebel of the Family*, p. 54.

Primarily, Linton's novel utilises Perdita's same-sex friendships (as well as her relationship with her mother) to dramatize, albeit somewhat exaggeratedly, the dilemmas of the single middle-class woman attempting to determine a suitably appropriate social role for herself from within ongoing cultural debates concerning class and gender. Linton's heroine, for instance, is caught between the competing arguments of her snobbish mother, advocating a financially lucrative marriage and 'conformity to the laws of drawing-room religion'; Bell, 'urging her to forget the restrictions of her sex'; and Mrs Crawford 'counselling reticence' and 'the suppression of all personal freedom' (RF, p. 178). Arguably, the dilemma that Linton poses for her heroine in the competing demands of these friendships might also be seen to exemplify Cosslett's claim that professional Victorian women writers exploited fictional portraits of female amity to resolve their own anxieties about nonconformity to conventional femininity. In fact, it might be argued that Perdita's friendships with Bell Blount and Mrs Crawford represent Perdita's negotiation between too extreme models of Linton herself: an economically self-sufficient, separated wife and self-elected archconservative spokesperson who relentlessly urged women to stay in the home and fulfil their natural feminine destinies as wives and mothers. Perdita, however, is unwilling to accept the directives from either of her friends or her mother, and with the approval of Linton's narrative voice, chooses to negotiate a further alternative for herself. As Valerie Sanders has argued, 'the heroine's story in this novel is structured round [*sic*] the discovery of her proper role'.[167] Sanders, however, regards Perdita's ultimate fate as an unsatisfactory return to the traditionalist values extolled by the likes of Mrs Crawford. The 'convenient marital dénouement', Sanders argues, 'seems disappointing' and Perdita's ambitions to work undermined by her own conservative gender ideals: 'all she wants is the single woman's right to earn a salary, until or unless she fulfils her destiny as a woman and finds a husband'.[168] Despite the fact, however, that Sanders acknowledges Linton's contemporaries were less certain about the precise socio-political message of the novel, to a certain extent Sanders's reading is a retrospective imposition of twentieth-century feminist expectations. As has been previously argued, whilst severely undermining what she had formerly caricatured as the 'Shrieking Sisterhood' of organised feminism, Linton nevertheless appears to

[167] Sanders, *Eve's Renegades*, *p*. 69.
[168] Sanders, *Eve's Renegades*, pp. 71, 70.

sympathetically align her heroine with the feminist arguments of some of her periodical adversaries.[169]

Although Linton overtly politicizes the personal through her characterisation of Perdita's two female friends, her novel is also directly concerned with highlighting as problematic the issue of elective female friendship itself. *The Academy*, for instance, noted in its review that Linton's heroine was 'meant for a martyred *femme incomprise*, more especially from her instinct for forming undesirable acquaintances'.[170] In fact, Perdita's choice of companions is a much greater source of anguish and disagreement between her mother and herself than her decision to find employment. Whilst Mrs Winstanley is prepared, albeit reluctantly, to risk the 'sanctity of caste' and allow Perdita to work she nevertheless refuses absolutely to consent to Perdita's continued association with Mrs Crawford and Bell Blount (RF, p. 77). Perdita must either give up these companions, finding friendship amongst those at home, and 'in those whom *they* make their own', or face expulsion (RF, p. 278; my emphasis). Yet, herein lies the fundamental dilemma of the novel. In response to her mother's demand, for example, that she abandon her friendship with Mrs Blount, Perdita justifiably protests that she has 'no friends' or 'companions at home' and in keeping with Charlotte Yonge's suggestion, has no other recourse than to seek female friendship 'out of doors' (RF, p. 278). Perdita's understandable complaint, however, is countered by Mrs Winstanley who alerts Perdita to the potential social hazards she exposes her family to when forming friendships on her own accord: 'You cannot make acquaintances on your own responsibility as if you did not belong to us. A family must hang together; and what you do touches us all' (RF, p. 278). Given the extent to which Perdita is already ostracized by her own family, her mother's instruction that she should not behave as if living in isolation from that family appear to be ironically unjust. Yet Mrs Winstanley's 'sensibl[e]'

[169] Linton's description of Bell Blount as one of the 'fuglemen of that ungazetted Society of Shrieking Sisterhood' is a direct reference to her own article, 'The Shrieking Sisterhood', in the *Saturday Review*, 12 March 1870, pp. 341-342. In this article, Linton specifically attacks what she considers to be the excessively voluble *methods* of organised feminism, rather than its aims. Presupposing her sympathetic account of Perdita, and possibly Mary Chesterton even more so, in *The Rebel*, Linton praises the unpublicised endeavours of individual women who establish for themselves a greater role in public life: 'The silent woman who quietly calculates her chances and measures her powers with her difficulties so as to avoid the probability of a *fiasco* […], does more for the real emancipation of her sex than any amount of pamphleteering, lecturing, or petitioning by the shrieking sisterhood can do', p. 341.

[170] E. Purcell, 'New Novels' in *The Academy*, p. 131.

comments receive a rare signal of approval from Linton's narrative voice (RF, p. 278). That Linton's narrator would be more than reluctant to advocate a friendship between the proto-radical, lesbian feminist and Perdita is perhaps not surprising. However, whilst prompted by an objection to Perdita's particular friendship with Bell, Mrs Winstanley's argument is nevertheless concerned more broadly with the appropriate nature of same-sex female amity itself.

Conflicts of interest between Perdita's friendship and family loyalty or filial obedience are, of course, central to her mother's mercenary ambitions. Yet implicit in Linton's depiction of Mrs Winstanley's remonstration with Perdita are specific concerns regarding the perils of exclusive dyadic female amity. Mrs Winstanley's claim, for instance, that no one would be more pleased than herself to see Perdita 'choose proper and fitting friends' and 'surrounded by good influences' is rendered particularly significant when situated within the context of Sarah Ellis's advocacy of *disseminated* female friendship (RF, p. 278). According to Ellis, '[t]rue' female amity was founded within a small, but inclusive 'circle of young female friends'.[171] Young women, Ellis claimed, would demonstrate their love for each other through their mutual endeavours 'to support the weak […], to confirm the irresolute, [and] to reclaim the erring' within their 'little community'.[172] Underlying this claim was a belief that such an arrangement would ultimately propagate more widely qualities requisite of an idealized submissive femininity; such as sympathy, tenderness and self-sacrifice. For Ellis, female friendship, structured in terms of an ensemble of young women, operates as an effective school in consolidating limited gender expectations and where each young woman 'learns what constitutes the happiness and the misery of woman'.[173] Although, for Mrs Winstanley, the gendering principles of collective female friendship might be imagined as operating in tandem with her less liberal desire to safeguard Perdita's upper middle-class identity as a 'young lady', the potential benefits of instigating and regulating conformity suggested by Ellis's vision of expansive homosociality are certainly not lost on Perdita's mother (RF, p. 278). That is to say, in her idealised portrait of Perdita, 'surrounded by good influences', Mrs Winstanley envisages her daughter as being enclosed within a collection of friends, predetermined by her mother and sisters,

[171] Ellis, *The Daughters of England*, p. 277.
[172] Ellis, *The Daughters of England*, p. 277.
[173] Ellis, *The Daughters of England*, p. 277.

who tacitly lay siege to the young rebel's propensity to act upon her own 'foolish ideas' (RF, p. 278).

Ellis's idealized model of communal female amity adds further significance, however, to Linton's depiction of Mrs Winstanley's concerns regarding Perdita's tendency to independently form friendships outside of the family. In particular, Ellis was keen to discourage dyadic female bonds which, she argued, were not representative of a 'pure and disinterested affection'.[174] Presupposing the concerns expressed by the author of *The Ladies' Vase*, Ellis warned against the potentially hostile consequences resulting from an all too consuming dyadic friendship. These bonds, she argued, were apt to generate 'jealous[y]' and 'suspicio[n]' and would therefore undermine the very ideals of femininity she believed female friendship should promote.[175] Accompanying Ellis's disapproval, however, appears to be an undercurrent of concern relating to the potential disturbance that such bonds may have had upon the heterosexual economy. 'Friendship, which is narrowed up between two individuals, and confined to that number alone', she suggested 'is calculated only for the intercourse of married life'.[176] Arguably, by equating intense dyadic female relationships with marriage, Ellis might be seen here to associate the erotically charged female friendship of two young women with the implicit sexual bond that defined matrimony. More noticeably, however, her claim that an exclusive bond of friendship between two women was rarely conducive to any 'lasting benefit or satisfaction' appears to reveal an anxiety that the formation of close bonds between two 'romantic and affectionate' women threatened to derail their ultimate destiny as wives (and mothers).[177] Consequently, the underlying principles of Ellis's idealized vision of collective female friendships can be seen to be twofold. In addition to promoting adherence to cultural ideals regarding feminine roles and duties, membership of a small circle of young female friends, for Ellis, also encouraged the dissemination of female affection, thus inhibiting the possibility for one young woman to form an ardently exclusive bond with another.

Similar anxieties regarding intensely close bonds of friendship between two women, and the advocacy of disseminated female homosociality are also evident in Mrs Winstanley's arguments. In addition to promoting friendship as multiple, rather

[174] Ellis, *The Daughters of England*, p. 276.
[175] Ellis, *The Daughters of England*, p. 276.
[176] Ellis, *The Daughters of England*, pp. 276-277.
[177] Ellis, *The Daughters of England*, p. 277.

than exclusive, Mrs Winstanley also draws attention to the central role family bonds have in mitigating the dangers inherent in passionate bonds of female friendship. Her advocacy of family allegiance, for instance, is undoubtedly an allusion to Linton's earlier account of Perdita's friend, Mary Chesterton, 'all of whose affection', we are told, was reserved for her own family (RF, p. 177). The intention of Linton's narrator in this particular portrait is clearly to demonstrate that the exclusivity of Mary's familial devotion tempers her relationship with Perdita, effectively preventing it from becoming inappropriately eroticized. Having invested all of her affection in her family, Mary has no need or desire to find an emotional outlet in female friendship beyond her home. In contrast to the 'wealth of passionate love' Linton's isolated heroine could afford to 'spend' upon her working companion, Mary 'had but a very mild measure of interest to give' to Perdita (RF, p. 177). Notably, Linton's narrator suggests that the modest terms of Mary's reciprocated friendship save her from becoming the focus of Perdita's all-consuming and somewhat unhealthy idealization. Discouraged by Mary's lack of ardour, Perdita is compelled to recognize that her own enthusiastic romantic idealism would have been greatly squandered on this young woman. 'The "waste" would have been too great and too evident even for Perdita, who yet was not clever at calculating moral interest', Linton's narrator declares, and thus 'instead' of becoming Perdita's 'alter ego' and 'furiously beloved' Mary remained a pleasant, albeit 'unexciting' acquaintance and 'things were all the more wholesome because of this absence of excess' (RF, pp. 177, 176).

This depiction of Perdita's capacity to transform romantic same-sex female friendship into an intensely erotic bond, however, is also haunted by the intimation that a reciprocal bond of ardent female affection potentially threatens to awaken latent (homo)sexual desire. As Deborah Meem has argued, although Perdita is somewhat ambivalent about Bell Blount's courtship of her, she is nevertheless depicted as being highly susceptible to the seductive charms of Mrs Blount: 'Perdita finds Bell attractive to a nearly irresistible degree, and readers of *Rebel* are meant to pick up on that magnetism as well'.[178] The suggestion that Perdita herself may become sexually attracted to other women through friendship is more evident, however, in the vocabulary Linton uses to delineate her relationship with Mary.

[178] Meem, 'Introduction', *The Rebel of the Family*, p. 13.

Ostensibly, terms such as 'wealth', 'calculating' and 'interest' might serve to signal Perdita's shift away from the mercenary economics of the marriage market (orchestrated by her increasingly impoverished mother) to the financially remunerative context of the public workplace.[179] Historians of Victorian sexuality such as Steven Marcus and Fraser Harrison, however, have drawn attention to the 'rhetorical slippage' of a Victorian lexicon in which concepts of money, economics and sexuality are conflated.[180] Steven Marcus, for instance, argues that 'a common Victorian euphemism for orgasm was "to spend"', and that the medical discourse of William Acton, in particular, equated the intemperate sexual activity of some middle-class men with the unrestrained and improvident speculations of financiers.[181] One might, therefore, consider the significance of Linton's narrator's claim that Perdita 'was [as yet] not clever at calculating moral interest' (RF, p. 177). The insinuation of a potentially emergent sexual desire in Perdita's relationship with Mary is reinforced by a further allusion to Acton's medical lexis, however. In suggesting that their friendship was 'all the more wholesome' because its latent eroticism had been curtailed, Linton's narrator implicitly echoes Acton's cautionary advice against uninhibited sexual conduct both within and outside the culturally sanctioned confines of marriage. Whilst 'the word *excess'* had become synonymous in the minds of the general public with men's '*illicit*' extra-marital sexual activity, he claimed, it was equally applicable to the unreserved and ardent sexual conduct of (newly) married couples.[182] Thus, for some of Linton's contemporaries, her use of this particular term, to define an uninhibited passionate bond between two young women, is somewhat loaded. That is to say, by describing unrestrained (erotic) female friendships as excessive, Linton might be seen to be implying that such relationships are in danger of prompting, if not nurturing, latent sexual desire.

It is important to recognize, however, that the ultimate 'absence' of eroticism within this relationship is not attributed by Linton's narrator to any act of determined restraint on the part of Perdita, but the result of a corresponding lack of

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[179] Eva, 'being the most beautiful' according to Linton's narrator, was considered 'the best investment of maternal hopes and the family future'; Thomasina's 'manners and style made the best assets in her personal treasury'; conversely, Perdita was a 'very poor investment', pp. 24-25.

[180] Natalka Freeland, '"Ruth's" Perverse Economies: Women, Hoarding, and Expenditure' in *ELH*, Vol.70, No.1 (Spring, 2003), pp. 197-221, p. 203.

[181] Steven Marcus, *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England*; quoted in Freeland, p.203.

[182] William Acton, *The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs in Childhood, Youth, Adult Age, and Advanced Life* (London: J. A. Churchill, 1875), 6th ed., p. 191. Acton's emphasis.

enthusiasm from Mary. A revealing contrast which demonstrates the importance of Mary's (lack of) responsiveness might be made between this scene of muted acquaintanceship and that of one in which Bell's pursuit of Perdita is shown to profit from her outpouring of unequivocal 'love' (RF, p. 291). In fact Perdita is most receptive to Bell when the latter's expressions of devotion extend beyond simple female friendship. For instance, whilst fervently attempting to persuade Perdita not to yield to her mother's ultimatum but to come and live with her, 'your truest friend [and] safest *lover*!',[183] Bell's outburst of 'passionate emotion' we are told, 'gained on [Perdita] so far that she returned her caress with gratitude and affection' (RF, pp. 291-292). Linton's heroine, at this point 'tightly clasped' by Bell, is also rash enough to finally agree to go and live with Bell, if failing in a final attempt to induce Mrs Winstanley to allow her to lead an independent life and 'keep her own friends' (RF, pp.292, 293). Only the unexpected arrival of Connie Tracy, which causes Perdita to 'shrink[…] back' and reconsider the full implications of completely ostracizing herself from her own family, prevent Bell from exacting a definitive promise from Linton's heroine (RF, p. 292). In her own reading of this episode, Meem has suggested that the sudden return of Connie allows Linton to leave tantalisingly unanswered the question of what might otherwise have immediately resulted from this embrace. It would, however, seem more plausible that Connie's sudden intervention is deployed in the first instance by Linton to register contemporary beliefs that ardent female friendships were susceptible to hazardous misinterpretation and misappropriation. As has been noted earlier, Carolyn Oulton has suggested that the fictional portraits of romantic friendship offered by Victorian novelists were part of a broader cultural discourse that anxiously attempted to define and police the boundaries between permissible ardent female intimacy and trangressive erotic or sexual relationships between women. Her claim that fictional accounts of homosocial intimacy involved contrasting an ingenuous protagonist alongside a 'lascivious' but 'compelling secondary figure' in order to highlight the

[183] Deborah Meem has drawn attention to a discrepancy in Linton's depiction of Bell's avowal of devotion. According to Meem, in the first (Chatto & Windus) edition of the novel (1880) Bell describes herself as Perdita's 'safest love' and in all subsequent editions the word was revised to 'lover'. However, 'lover' had also been previously used in the initial serialization of the novel (February to December, 1880). It would seem likely, therefore, that Linton's primary intention had always been for Bell to specifically represent her attraction to Perdita in an implicitly sexual context. As such, my reading of this episode is based on Bell's description of herself as 'lover'; see Linton, 'The Rebel of the Family' in *Temple Bar* (September, 1880), pp. 116-144., p. 133. My emphasis.

potential sexual hazards of romantic friendship would certainly seem to apply to Linton's portrait of Perdita's relationship with Bell.[184] In fact, given Perdita's responsiveness to Bell, the sexual dangers posed to licit romantic friendship would seem to be particularly acute for Linton. Despite Connie's perceptive explanation to Bell, for instance, that her amorous pursuit of Linton's heroine is futile because '[s]he will never be one of us', the fact remains that Perdita's reciprocated affection inadvertently encourages Bell even more in her ambition to construct what essentially would have become an all-female ménage à trois.[185]

Connie's intervention has additional significance, however, in that it serves to remind Linton's readers that her heroine's search for independence and friendship (inseparable ideals for Perdita) is always a process of negotiating her difference from other women in the novel. Ostensibly, Perdita's endeavour to secure emancipation and companionship is depicted as an ongoing navigation between the radical ideals of Bell and the conservative values of Mrs Crawford. Yet Connie's comments also act as an aide memoire of the disparity of ideals between Perdita and her own family; a disparity which defines not only her relationship with her mother but, more significantly, with her sisters also. Connie's suggestion that Linton's heroine 'will never be one of us', in particular, directly mirrors that of Perdita's own affirmation of difference from Eva and Thomasina when, earlier in the novel, she tells her disappointed mother that 'we are not the same kind of girls' (RF, p. 100). In fact, Linton's novel would seem to suggest that, at least fundamentally, Perdita's pursuit of independence and companionship is contingent upon sustaining her difference from her two sisters rather than establishing an affinity with either Mrs Crawford or Bell Blount. This, of course, is principally dramatized by her refusal to concur with Mrs Winstanley's mercenary estimation of marriage and her subsequent endeavour to become economically self-sufficient. However, although Perdita is ultimately rewarded for her distinctive integrity with the proposition of a companionate marriage to Leslie and Mrs Crawford's maternal friendship, Linton's novel also demonstrates that Perdita's singularity within the triad of Winstanley sisters is never entirely absolute or stable. Indeed, at times, Linton's heroine and her unscrupulous younger sister Eva appear to be somewhat analogous. Unlike their

[184] Oulton, *Romantic Friendship*, p. 24.
[185] Bell's lesbian household might also be seen to represent a bizarre parody of Mary Chesterton's own quiet 'family of women', p. 176.

'frosty' elder sister Thomasina, for instance, both Perdita and Eva 'had undisciplined passions' and were equally predisposed to outbursts of 'hysterical over-excitation' (RF, pp. 374, 240). When 'anger[ed]' or opposed Eva could, on occasions, be as volatile as the 'wild' and 'erratic' Perdita (RF, pp. 240, 166). Moreover, compounding Perdita and Eva's similar passionate dispositions is their corresponding susceptibility to the allure of sexual predators who display a complete disregard for the conventional ideals of heteronormativity. Whilst Perdita is beguiled by the unfaithful Mrs Blount, who had abandoned her husband and children to live with Connie, Eva is captivated by the morally bankrupt libertine Vicompte de Bois-Duval, who had previously seduced Leslie's wife Florence, and fathered her daughter, Lily.

It is, however, through her relationship with the chemist that Perdita becomes most closely associated with her flirtatious younger sister. Whilst Eva embroils herself in a clandestine and 'vulgar romance' with de-Bois Duval, Perdita simultaneously becomes involved in her own romantic intrigue with Leslie Crawford, whose wife Florence, although mysteriously absent at the time Perdita befriends him, is still alive. Despite being 'disappointed' and discomforted by the discovery that Leslie was a married man, Perdita nevertheless effectively chooses to elide the 'unwelcome matter' of Florence by attempting to convince herself that a discontinuation of her acquaintance with the Crawfords would be an act of ingratitude (RF, p. 158). Here, Linton's narrative voice is sympathetic, suggesting that although Perdita had fallen in love with Leslie, her intentions were not disreputable: 'honest Perdita', we are informed, 'was a daughter of Eve like any one else, and could, on occasions, deceive herself' (RF, p. 161). This apparent plea for clemency, however, cannot completely erase the fact that Perdita's hitherto steadfast integrity is notably undermined by her surreptitious conduct, and demonstrates that, like her two sisters, she was not entirely exempt from actively practising duplicity. Taking full advantage of her mother and sisters' absence abroad, for instance, Linton's heroine made 'weekly visit[s] to the rooms above the shop' which she deliberately concealed from the Winstanleys' ex-governess who had temporarily been reemployed as her chaperone (RF, p. 177). During her visits Perdita 'saw a good deal of the chemist', but his wife, with whom Perdita believed friendship would be most unlikely, remained conspicuously absent from the Crawford

household (RF, p. 178). Yet, in spite of Perdita's growing attachment to Leslie and her anxious curiosity about the absent Florence, who appeared in Perdita's feverish dreams as an angel 'barring the way to the Garden of Eden', Linton's rebel fails to demonstrate anything like her usual candour (RF, p. 160). Rather than ask directly after Florence's whereabouts, Perdita prefers instead to reconcile herself with the belief that Leslie's wife had died. These inconsistencies in Perdita's otherwise open and honourable conduct were sufficient to provoke one Victorian reviewer, E. Purcell to complain that Linton's heroine's 'rampant love of truth' was somewhat disingenuous.[186] For example, whilst conceding that overall Perdita was 'a good, well-meaning girl', and worthy of interest, '[t]hat she should never have learnt or even enquired about [Florence's] existence', he protested, was 'simply incredible'.[187]

Notably, however, Purcell was less forgiving of what he considered to be Perdita's lack of sororal allegiance and, in particular, the fact that whilst she was prepared to 'take stolen walks' with Leslie she nevertheless refused to actively help conceal Eva's attempted midnight elopement with de Bois-Duval: 'Nothing can be more grandly ferocious than her rampant love of truth […] she cannot possibly tell a fib to save her sister from infamy and her mother from ruin; but somehow, after this supreme sacrifice to Truth, she can slip out on the sly to the chemist's'.[188] Modern readers of the novel might be forgiven for thinking that Purcell's comments are somewhat unreasonable, given that Perdita's active complicity in screening Eva's misconduct from Mrs Winstanley would entail substituting herself as culprit. In taking umbrage at Perdita's refusal to commit the apparently innocuous offence of telling 'a fib' in order to safeguard her sister's reputation, Purcell, it might be argued, overlooks the severity of consequences that could ensue from this act of sororal loyalty. After all, to 'bear the blame' of Eva's 'dangerous escapade' is, as Perdita complains, to further the risk of her own banishment from home. However, Purcell's seemingly unjust evaluation of Perdita, and perhaps somewhat lenient attitude towards the dangerously coquettish Eva, when situated in its historical context, can be seen to allude to important underlying cultural beliefs regarding the relationships of sisters.

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[186] E. Purcell, 'New Novels', *The Academy and Literature*, (19 February 1881), pp. 131-132, p. 131.
[187] E. Purcell, 'New Novels', *The Academy*, p. 131.
[188] E. Purcell, 'New Novels', *The Academy*, p. 131.

In the remaining section of this chapter it is argued that rather than being dependent upon close bonds of female friendship to promote marriage, Linton's novel depicts Perdita's ability to secure the promise of companionate marriage as being primarily determined by a complex negotiation of similarity and difference between herself and Eva. The following discussion will draw upon the work of Helena Michie who, in her feminist reappraisal of biological and metaphorical sororal bonds, has argued that Victorian culture constructed the trope of sisterhood as a safe space in which women could articulate both anger and sexuality. Underlying Michie's important claim, and central to my own argument, is her reading of a number of Victorian discourses and texts that sought to understand sisterhood in terms of oppositional, yet unstable characteristics and identities. Framed within more recent contemporary psychological accounts of the relationships of siblings, Michie's study focuses on the conduct literature of Sarah Ellis and Charlotte Yonge, as well as the controversies that surrounded the perennially contested Deceased Wife's Sister Act of 1835 (which prohibited marriage between a widower and his late-wife's sister). In her analysis of the Deceased Wife's Sister Act, for example, Michie signals the importance of two conflicting narratives which were produced by those who endorsed and those who opposed the act. Whilst those who wished to preserve the act depicted the widower and his sister-in-law as a 'vicious' couple impatiently waiting for the wife to die, so as to legitimize their criminal relationship, those who argued for reform, Michie notes, envisioned and represented this couple as devoted to the continued care of the deceased wife's children and mutually committed to the memory of a cherished wife and sister.[189] These conflicting narratives, Michie argues, generated a number of vexed questions about the nature of sisterhood and relationships between Victorian sisters which centred upon the uncertainties of substitution and reiteration. Sisters, for instance, could be understood as '[m]etaphoric replacements' for one another, but also, far less benignly, as '[c]ompetitors'.[190] Similar difficulties also arose in attempting to comprehend whether the deceased sister was replaced primarily as a mother or as a wife. Thus, marriage to a sister's widower could be conceived as either 'the ultimate act of loyalty' or the 'ultimate act of betrayal'.[191] The unresolved

[189] Michie, *Sororophobia*, p. 23.
[190] Michie, *Sororophobia*, p. 24.
[191] Michie, *Sororophobia*, p. 24.

speculations about the relationship of deceased and surviving sisters, Michie argues, clearly influenced the way in which relations between living sisters were understood. Two of the first three divorces granted to women earlier in the century, she suggests, evidenced that legislation had already been framed around issues of sororal jealousy and substitution. Sanctioned on the basis of the husband's adultery with his wife's sister, these two divorces, Michie notes, 'not only pitted wife against husband but sister against sister'.[192]

Michie's reading of conduct literature reveals similar contradictions in the constructions of Victorian sisterhood. In *The Women of England*, for instance, Sarah Ellis's eulogy to sororal bliss is juxtaposed alongside an account of 'the painful spectacle of sisters forming obstacles to each other['s] […] happiness', and whose cruelty arose from their intimate knowledge of one another. [193] As Michie notes, Ellis offers 'two counter-narratives' which appear to suggest that the joys of sisterhood are dependent upon separation and that the close physical proximity of sisters 'makes for unhappiness, competition, and emotional violence'.[194] In the context of Linton's portrait of the Winstanley sisters, Michie's analysis of Ellis's account is worth developing further. As Michie observes, for Ellis, sororal intimacy was productive of sororal antagonism, but Michie stops short of providing a full explanation as to *how* and *why* exactly sororal intimacy was understood to have generated hostility. Ellis, for instance, had argued that the close domestic proximity of sisters allowed them to develop an astute and unique insight into one another's characteristic flaws and limitations. Although she claimed that this could be of great benefit to their relationships, she also notes that such familiarity could also become the source of enmity. Whilst, ideally, this close acquaintance with each other's 'weak points' should have provoked the highest form of sympathy and kindness, Ellis nevertheless laments the fact that some sisters would maliciously exploit this 'mutual knowledge': 'while it ought to excite their utmost tenderness', Ellis complained, it 'only affords them subjects for tormenting sarcasm, and biting scorn'.[195] Underlying Ellis's claim, however, is a cautionary notice regarding the potential dangers of complacency and boredom that she claimed were generated within households that were unaccustomed to 'the visitation of any deep

[192] Michie, *Sororophobia*, p. 24.
[193] Sarah Ellis, *The Women of England*, quoted in Michie, p. 25.
[194] Michie, *Sororophobia*, p. 25.
[195] Ellis, *The Women of England*, pp. 224-225.

affliction'.[196] The ensuing consequence of having experienced little or no disruption to the family's 'uniformly easy' circumstances was a false sense of permanent contentment, Ellis suggested, which led some sisters to believe that they could 'afford' to amuse themselves by indiscriminately tormenting one another:

> They seem to think that the hey-day of life to be so unclouded, that they can afford, wantonly and perversely, to intercept the sunshine that would otherwise fall upon each other's path; or to calculate so confidently upon the continued smoothness of the stream of time, that they sportively drive each other upon the rocks and quicksands […].[197]

Hostility between sisters was therefore, according to Ellis, an aberrant form of recreation which arose from the desire of sisters to introduce a level of dramatic crisis into their otherwise seemingly uneventful lives. Moreover, given her claims regarding the potential disadvantages of sororal intimacy, Ellis can be seen to define sisterhood as a particularly effective means of providing both the script and occasion for the staging of this drama.

Although Ellis's narrative of dysfunctional sisterhood is specifically related to young women and girls from the commercial and trading sectors of the middle classes, a comparable (although not identical) understanding of wilful sororal antagonism can be seen to inform Linton's later representation of the genteel Winstanley sisters and, more specifically, Eva's relationship with Perdita. Whilst Perdita's relationship with her older sister tended on occasions to be fractious, despite Perdita's genuine desire that they become 'good friends', relations between Eva and Perdita are particularly hostile (RF, p. 167). Perdita's ardent idealism certainly frustrates her elder sister but, mindful of the young rebel's 'unfortunate temper', Thomasina 'never went out of her way to worry her' (RF, pp. 87, 81). Eva, however, was far less prepared to conciliate to Perdita's volatile nature and, in keeping with Ellis's claims, 'sportively' exploited her sister's characteristic flaw. As Perdita legitimately complained to Mrs Crawford, 'when Eva is cross, or has nothing else to do, she teases me till I get wild and say and do all manner of violent, wicked things' (RF, p. 167). Perdita's furious responses to Eva's mischief-making, of

[196] Ellis, *The Women of England*, p. 224.
[197] Ellis, *The Women of England*, pp. 224-225.

course, only serve to ostracize her further from her family. Yet, notwithstanding the sympathy that Linton had intended her readers should feel for her persecuted semi-autobiographical heroine, Linton's portrait reveals that Perdita is to a certain degree an accomplice in perpetuating sororal disharmony. A noticeable cessation in Eva's harassment of Perdita, for instance, appears to occur *after* Linton's heroine had become uncharacteristically subdued as a result of having fallen in love with Leslie. Preoccupied with a 'long[ing]' to reacquaint herself with the chemist who had saved her from suicide, Perdita became 'less aggressive in her principles and less annoying in their utterance' (RF, p. 137). Subsequently, not only were her mother and Thomasina able to enjoy 'a respite from their duty of perpetual rebuke' but '[e]ven Eva', we are told, 'forbore to tease her'(RF, p. 137). This rare scene of tranquillity within the Winstanley home contrasts starkly with an earlier episode in the novel in which Eva takes umbrage at being rebuked by Thomasina for having further aggravated Linton's already vexed heroine. On this occasion Mrs Winstanley's frustration with Perdita's increasing 'unconventional[ity]' had led her to openly conjecture that her middle daughter might be a changeling (RF, p. 85). Deeply upset at her mother's supposition, Perdita had 'blazed out into a fierce and uncontrollable fit of passionate despair', accusing Mrs Winstanley of failing to treat her as a daughter (RF, p. 86). Whilst 'outraged' on her mother's behalf, Thomasina, nevertheless sympathized 'in her secret heart' with her 'wicked and ill-regulated' sister (RF, p. 86). Eva, however, was pitiless in her attempt to make a 'bad' situation 'worse' by taunting Perdita with mock rebukes (RF, p. 86). When subsequently reproached by Thomasina for being too 'fond of trying' Perdita, Eva's predictable response is to blame Perdita for being unnecessarily oversensitive and incapable of bearing 'a little fun!' (RF, p. 87). Yet, her indignant response also reveals that to a certain degree she resents the imposition of having to accommodate Perdita's volatility. Becoming 'cross' herself with Thomasina, Eva declares that '[o]ne can't be always thinking whether what one says will make Perdita cross or not!' (RF, p. 87).

Despite her inadvertent role as an accomplice in sustaining the animosity between herself and Eva, however, Perdita has absolutely no desire to make an enemy of her younger sister or, for that matter, Thomasina. Perdita confides in Mrs Crawford, for example, that she 'would love both of them so much if they would let

[her]!' (RF, p. 167). Here, Linton's portrait of antagonistic sisterhood can be seen to deviate from Ellis's earlier account. According to Ellis, hostility between sisters was a reciprocal ritual of offence and retaliation in which one slighted sister would fortify herself with a 'fresh resolution for the next point of dispute, that she may enjoy her turn of victory and triumph'.[198] By contrast, Linton's heroine displays no inclination to exact triumphant vengeance over Eva. Whilst furious, her responses to Eva's frequent teasing are immediate, unpremeditated and a source of deep personal shame and 'self-loathing'(RF, p. 87). Notwithstanding the asymmetrical nature of Linton's account of sororal hostility, her portrait nevertheless accords to a certain extent with Ellis's description of the modus operandi of recreational sororal antagonism.

Linton's depiction of the Winstanley sisters also concurs with Ellis's arguments regarding the underlying cause of hostile sisterly relations. In particular, Linton offers a fictional portrait of Eva which suggests that her animosity toward Perdita was a consequence of the relatively complacent lifestyle that she alone amongst the Winstanley sisters was permitted to enjoy. As the most beautiful of the three Winstanley daughters, and therefore 'the best investment of maternal hopes', Eva was excused from enduring many, if not all of the privations resultant of their diminished financial situation (RF, p. 24). Primarily, Eva's immunity from adversity manifests itself in her receiving 'more than her strict share of dainties' and new gowns from her 'indulgent mother' (RF, pp.24, 215). In addition to benefitting from Mrs Winstanley's material favouritism, however, Eva is also shielded by her mother from experiencing any of the psychological distress suffered by her sisters. Whilst Thomasina, being the eldest, was 'naturally' the one daughter in whom the increasingly beleaguered Mrs Winstanley 'most confided', and Perdita was driven to 'semi-madness' and 'despair' by futile attempts to convince her family of the economic benefits of paid employment, Eva, in accordance with her mother's wishes, was not only to be kept 'well in body', but 'serene in mind' (RF, p. 24). The 'knowledge of pecuniary difficulties', Mrs Winstanley calculated, posed a serious threat to her youngest daughter's carefree spirit and 'bewitching insouciance' which, she 'reckoned', was 'equal to the repute of some hundreds per annum'(RF, p. 24). Thus, in order to safeguard Eva's value in the marriage market, Mrs Winstanley

[198] Ellis, *The Women of England*, p. 227.

determined it was 'only wise' that she should 'pet and cherish' her youngest daughter (RF, p. 24). Although intended as an attack upon "Belgravian mothers" who, like Mrs Winstanley, were prepared to 'sell' their daughters 'to the highest bidder', Linton's account of Eva's somewhat privileged existence is also a continuation of the author's condemnation of self-indulgent femininity. Traces of Eva, for instance, can be glimpsed in Linton's 1868 article 'The Fashionable Woman'. In this essay Linton denounces the figure of the upper middle-class woman who is without useful occupations, and thus amused herself by engaging in a series of dubious romances. Resemblances to Eva can also be found in Linton's 'Girl of the Period' essay of the same year. Like Linton's notorious anti-heroine, who believed 'the sole idea of life [was] plenty of fun', Eva, we are told, preoccupied herself with nothing more than the 'pleasure of the hour' and 'the successful ruse of the day' (RF, p. 205). Notably, as Linton's novel demonstrates, Eva's daily ruse was often (although not always) to tease Perdita.

Unlike Linton and Ellis, however, Charlotte Yonge was more optimistic about the 'modifying' influence that domestic intimacy had upon sisterly relations and, as has been earlier noted, regarded hostility to be more widespread 'among girls thrown together without relationship'.[199] Nevertheless, as Michie observes, Yonge's depiction of sororal friendship is determined by an organising principle of complementarity. For example, Yonge regarded childhood amity between sisters to have been dependent upon notable differences in age. Elder daughters of a family, she argued, had far more amicable relationships with their youngest sisters than they did with those who were closer in age. Whilst 'as kind as possible to the babies', the elder sister, she claimed, was 'harsh and impatient to the middle-sized children'.[200] Although overlooking Yonge's implicit message that a dutiful older sister was expected to undertake an auxiliary or surrogate maternal role that, in itself, would further emphasise a difference in sororal identities, Michie's analysis is nevertheless substantiated further by her reading of Yonge's portrait of adult sisterhood and, in particular, Yonge's depiction of unmarried sisters:

[199] Charlotte Yonge, *Womankind*, quoted in Michie, p. 26.
[200] Yonge quoted in Michie, p. 26.

> Besides, owing to the much-talked of redundancy of females, sisters often remain the first with each other through life, […] and preserve the same relative position with which they started as soon as their age brought them such an equality that force of character could assert itself. One remains leader and originator, and housekeeper and manager; the other is her complement for life, and the tie is never loosened.[201]

As Michie persuasively contends, Yonge's narrative is insistent that the benign relationship of two sisters is dependent upon each continuing to complement the other in some manner. Thus, like Ellis, Michie suggests, Yonge constructs 'an ideal sisterhood that absorbs conflict into meticulously choreographed *contrast*'.[202] In the above example of Yonge's description of adulthood, for instance, disparity in age is neutralised by maturity but this difference is subsequently replaced by a contrast in disposition.

Equally important, however, for the purposes of the following discussion of Linton's novel, is the correspondence that Michie identifies between more recent sociological and psychological accounts of sororal bonds and Victorian concepts of sisterhood. In particular, Michie's analysis is indebted to the work of Stephen Bank and Michael Khan who have argued that the structuring trope of 'anticipated differences' imposed by family expectations regarding sibling identities establishes, at least partially, the model which siblings themselves subsequently use to organise their relationships with one another.[203] In their chapter which explores the origins of ambivalent attachments formed between siblings Bank and Kahn have suggested that the acquisition of childhood identity derives from parental comparisons. By 'contrasting one child's reactions with those of another', they argue, a passive girl 'may become identified as "the calm one" […], while a more active, stimulus-sensitive sister may become known as "the excitable one," […] or the "troublemaker"'.[204] Bank and Kahn also suggest that even identical twins are subject to similar impositions of identity and role assignment. Arbitrary factors such as weight or which twin was born first, they claim, constitute components of complementary identities that might endure for a lifetime. Although not acquainted

[201] Yonge quoted in Michie, p. 26.
[202] Michie, *Sororophobia*, p. 26.
[203] Stephen P. Bank and Michael D. Kahn, *The Sibling Bond* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1982), p. 23.
[204] Bank and Kahn, *The Sibling Bond*, p. 23.

with modern discourses of psychology, one can clearly see that Yonge's benign account of Victorian sisterhood already presupposes Bank and Kahn's claim. However, Bank and Kahn also suggest that whilst the desire of parents to establish some form of individuation amongst their children is generally considered to be characteristic of a 'healthy, well-functioning family', their need to make each child different can have long-term detrimental consequences for sibling bonds.[205] According to their research findings, for instance, it would appear that in the majority of families there is only one individual who can inhabit 'a certain psychological space in the family at any one time' and as such 'pre-empts the possibility' that one sibling could occupy the role assigned to another.[206] The projections of such 'rigid identities' they claim, is evidenced as a prominent determinant of 'sibling conflict'.[207] As Michie notes, however, Bank and Kahn's research also draws attention to the important fact that siblings are not merely passive recipients of these external impositions. That is, in instances where siblings experience an '[e]arly and close merging of identities' because they have not been assigned distinctive roles or identities within the family unit, sibling relationships, Bank and Kahn argue, can become defined in terms of a mutual struggle to assert complementarity.[208] Although Michie acknowledges that Bank and Kahn's claim relates to same-sex pair siblings of both genders, she nevertheless suggests that sister pairs would be particularly prone to actively seeking (or experiencing the need) to engage in their own 'specular and spectacular choreographies of the self'.[209] Indeed reference to Bank and Kahn's account of a pair of identical twin sisters who admitted to having '[u]nconsciously […] agreed to differentiate according to the criterion of weight' provides a particularly illuminating (albeit extreme) example of Michie's theory.[210] In order to overcome being treated as a 'distinct pair' within the family group, or continued to be regarded as so alike as to be 'interchangeable', these twins sought to distinguish their own individuality by hazardously endeavouring to maintain a 'constant and conspicuous difference in body weight': whilst one sister 'stopped eating' and became anorexic, the other would force herself

[205] Bank and Kahn, *The Sibling Bond*, p. 23.
[206] Bank and Kahn, *The Sibling Bond*, p. 23.
[207] Bank and Kahn, *The Sibling Bond*, p. 24.
[208] Bank and Kahn, *The Sibling Bond*, p. 42.
[209] Michie, *Sororophobia*, p. 19.
[210] Bank and Kahn, *The Sibling Bond*, p. 43.

to gain weight.[211] Michie's study also draws upon the work of Toni McNaron to further support her own claim that sororal bonds are defined in terms of a choreographic role play of contrasts. Like Bank and Kahn, for instance, McNaron suggests that each sister is either allocated a role that is correspondingly relative to the other and which subsequently determines how they 'act out their adult lives', or 'one sister encourages the other to play out some complementary self' that she is not willing or able to become.[212]

Whilst such contemporary accounts provide a key insight into the way early Victorian culture understood sisterhood as a dramatization of difference, Michie's arguments are primarily derived from an analysis of dyadic sororal relationships. One needs to ask, therefore, to what extent was an ideal based on sororal complementarity amenable to accommodating the bonds of three sisters; and subsequently, what effect, if any, did it have upon their relationships with one another? Recourse to Yonge would certainly seem to suggest that Victorian constructions of dyadic sororal bonds were indeed exclusionary and prohibitive. As noted earlier, Yonge had argued that the complementary (and implicitly symmetrical) structure of sororal friendship would inevitably marginalise, if not ostracize another sister who would thus be compelled to seek 'solace with a friend'. Notably, in her own fictional portrait of the three Winstanley sisters, Linton can be seen to directly concur with Yonge's claim by describing Perdita as 'the unlucky sandwich' who was not only the victim of her 'impertinent' younger sister's teasing but was also frequently the subject of her elder sister's rebukes (RF, pp. 32, 167). The unaccommodating nature of complementary sisterhood, however, is explicitly demonstrated by Linton in her depiction of the crisis generated by Eva's attempted elopement with de Bois Duval. Here, Linton's 'inharmonious' rebel learns the full extent to which dyadic bonds of sisters are exclusionary (RF, p. 348). That is to say, having thwarted Eva's attempt to secretly abscond with de Bois-Duval, Linton's heroine is subsequently made a 'scapegoat' for her younger sister by Thomasina who, in order to safeguard Eva's reputation at the cost of Perdita's, exploited the incident to contrive Perdita's expulsion from home (RF, p. 382). Although not 'openly confessed' by either Thomasina or Mrs Winstanley, Perdita's eventual

[211] Bank and Kahn, *The Sibling Bond*, pp. 42-43.
[212] Toni A. H. McNaron, *The Sister Bond: A Feminist View of a Timeless Connection* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1985), p. 4, quoted in Michie, p. 19.

'banishment', we are told, was nevertheless something of a 'relief' to her mother and both sisters (RF, p. 370).

Given the bleak portrait of sisterly relations offered by Linton's novel it is perhaps not surprising that it concludes by gesturing toward a future in which (for Perdita, at least) the trope of sisterhood has no place.[213] Marriage to Leslie, for instance, promises a family in which dyadic female bonds are limited to that of mother and daughter. As the wife of Leslie, Perdita would inevitably become Lily's step-mother, thereby replacing Florence and legitimizing the maternal friendship of Mrs Crawford. Paradoxically, however, Linton's novel demonstrates that the hostility generated by sisterhood was instrumental in enabling Perdita to secure this future with Leslie. At its simplest, perhaps, Perdita's expulsion from the Winstanley home ensures that she is no longer compromised by a conflict between her obligations of 'filial obedience' and her 'secret love' for Leslie (RF, pp. 309, 353). Having already been 'punished' for Eva's misconduct, Perdita is at liberty to accept Leslie's proposal of marriage without fear of further of reprisals or penalisation from her family (RF, p. 178). Linton's novel, however, offers a more sophisticated portrait of sororal bonds which exceeds any simple suggestion that the exclusionary nature of dyadic sisterhood inadvertently propelled Perdita into the arms of Leslie. That is to say, in keeping with and extending upon Michie's analysis, Linton's novel can also be seen to offer us an account of triadic sisterhood in which the dramatization of difference, reiteration and substitution are all determining factors in Perdita's eventual companionate romance with Leslie. In addition, Linton's fictional portrait of the Winstanley sisters also evidences her engagement with the Victorian convention of representing sisterhood as a spectacle of difference which, as Michie has noted, continually invited readers and characters alike to make comparisons between sisters. Linton's introductory chapter, for instance, sets a precedent for the novel in which the Winstanley sisters are repeatedly defined in terms of comparatives: Eva 'the youngest – playful and caressing' was the 'most beautiful'; Thomasina, although 'not quite so handsome', 'was the eldest and wisest of the three'; Perdita, however, was neither 'beautiful like Eva nor graceful like Thomasina' (RF, pp. 24-25). Whilst chiefly given to acquaint her readers with Perdita's domestic isolation, Linton's initial account of distinctions in age,

[213] It might also be noted here that Bell's political 'Shrieking Sisterhood' no longer has any part in Perdita's future.

temperament, and appearance, nevertheless establishes a pattern for the seemingly compulsive tendency of other characters in the novel to make similar unfavourable comparisons that reinforce Perdita's ostracised status. Mrs Merton and Sir James Kearney, for instance, who share a predilection for attractive femininity, consider it to be almost incomprehensible that Perdita should have been a sister of Eva and Thomasina. Initially, Sir James had believed that the untidy and 'awkward' looking Perdita was Eva's 'governess' or her 'half-sister' (RF, pp. 127, 128). Perdita is similarly discredited for being an unfortunate anomaly amongst her sisters by Mrs Merton, for whom it had 'always been a mystery' that Mrs Winstanley had been able to produce a daughter so unlike Thomasina and Eva (RF, p. 363).

Perdita's marginalized status, highlighted both here in Mrs Merton's and Sir James's comments, as well as elsewhere in the novel, is depicted as being the direct consequence of her difference from Thomasina and Eva. Yet, whilst seeming to uphold this principle, Linton's novel also complicates it by demonstrating that differences between all three sisters are never entirely fixed. Mrs Merton's unflattering remarks about Perdita, for instance, certainly accord with Sir James's evaluation of Linton's heroine, but the widow's overall estimation of the Winstanley sisters digresses somewhat from the general consensus of opinion. Whilst concurring with many other characters in the novel that Eva was a 'beautiful little creature' and that Perdita was 'clever' but not 'pretty', Thomasina, Mrs Merton ardently declared, was 'both beautiful and clever' (RF, pp. 363, 366). Strongly attracted to the elder Winstanley sister, Mrs Merton's assertion is perhaps not surprising. Yet her comments not only entreat us to make (further) comparisons between the sisters but also, albeit momentarily, invite us to pause and call into question the stability of complementary sisterhood. Mrs Merton's admiration of Thomasina's attractiveness, for example, disrupts Linton's introductory account of the three sisters, wherein Thomasina had previously occupied an intermediary place within an implicit hierarchy of desirable femininity. More significantly, however, Mrs Merton's evaluation of the three sisters disrupts the organising principle of interdependency that informed complementary concepts of Victorian sisterhood. Michie, in her (post-structuralist) reading of Collins's *No Name*, has drawn attention to the fact that Mrs Garth's reevaluation of Magdalen inevitably involved a corresponding reappraisal of Norah. '[I]f one sister switches roles', Michie argues,

'the other must do the same'.[214] Thus, whilst differences between the Vanstone sisters are inverted, the contradictory structure of Victorian sisterhood is maintained. According to Mrs Merton's 'relative estimation' of the Winstanley sisters, however, Thomasina is not only different from Eva and Perdita but also simultaneously similar to both.[215] Eva and Thomasina, for instance, are equated because of their beauty but also distinguished from one another by the widow because, as she argued, 'no one would call [Eva] clever' (RF, p. 363). Conversely, Perdita and Thomasina are both defined by their corresponding intelligence whilst Perdita is differentiated from her sister(s) because she lacks Thomasina's (and Eva's) beauty.

The instabilities of contingent or complementary sisterhood are, however, most noticeably manifest in Linton's portrait of Perdita who, more often than not, is compelled by the impositions of others to become a replacement for one or other of her two sisters. The most obvious occurrence of this is perhaps Perdita's expulsion from home, whereupon Thomasina had ensured that Linton's heroine became a substitute for Eva. Perdita, however, also (temporarily) replaces her elder sister by inadvertently attracting the romantic interest of Mr Brocklebank. Although the ironmaster was 'essentially Thomasina's admirer', he quickly became enamoured with Perdita after misinterpreting her sincere gratitude for his sponsorship, as well as her innate shyness, as a tacit maidenly expression of her love for him (RF, p. 30). Mr Brocklebank's amorous interest in the Winstanley sisters, however, also extended on occasions to Eva whom 'he watched […] with more than common interest' (RF, p. 30). Primarily, Mr Brocklebank's promiscuous fascination provides yet further instances of and invitations to make comparisons that reinforce the disparities between the sisters. His erroneous belief that any one of them would willingly assent to become his wife, for example, produces a dilemma which he sought to resolve by inviting them to his home at Armour Court where he could 'study them *all* closely' in order to decide 'which of the three would suit him best' (RF, p. 69; my emphasis). Mr Brocklebank's dilemma, however, whilst provoked by the differences between the three sisters, highlights the apparent inter-changeability of Thomasina and Perdita. Having finally 'made up his mind' that Perdita was to become his wife, Thomasina's erstwhile suitor is obliged to revise his decision and subsequently marry the elder Winstanley sister when Linton's astonished heroine declines his

[214] Michie, *Sororophobia*, p. 29.
[215] Michie, *Sororophobia*, p. 29.

offer of marriage (RF, p. 301). Perdita's refusal to replace Thomasina as Mr Brocklebank's wife is, of course, intended by Linton to demonstrate the integrity of her heroine by emphasising further the contrast between Perdita's singularly ardent commitment to companionate marriage and her sisters' willingness to contract financially lucrative, yet loveless marriages.

Linton's novel, however, suggests that in order for Perdita to succeed in her seemingly honourable struggle to marry the man she loves, she must first imitate, if not replicate her mercenary sisters, and, in particular, Eva. As I argued earlier, the two youngest Winstanley sisters are rendered synonymous because both were engaged in clandestine relationships. What fundamentally aligns Perdita and Eva, therefore, is their (hetero)sexuality. Primarily, however, Linton's novel uses sexuality as a means to differentiate between the two sisters whereby Perdita and Eva inhabit opposing positions of the Virgin Mary/Mary Magdalen dichotomy respectively. Eva, for instance, is frequently associated with the figure of the fallen (public) woman. On one occasion she is likened by Mr Brocklebank to a fictional prostitute, and on another, when she attends the Theatre with her family and the ironmaster she is shown to be more akin to the spectacle of the actresses on the stage than she is as a member of the audience. [216] As the 'most effective' 'show-girl' of the three sisters, she is displayed to full advantage and given 'the most prominent place' by Mr Brocklebank, who was eager that his Theatre-box 'should make a good appearance' (RF, pp. 267-268).

By contrast, Perdita's (hetero)sexuality is ostensibly represented as a manifestation of her maternal instinct and, as such, associates Linton's heroine with the pinnacle of middle-class Victorian heteronormative femininity; namely, motherhood. Like 'all nice girls', Perdita 'was very fond of children' but never more so than after having been introduced to Lily and, Linton's narrator implies, reacquainted with Leslie: 'No doubt she was very fond of children, but she was not always stirred by them to her present pitch of excitement' (RF, p. 157). Here Linton's narrator appears to imply that the sudden intensification of Perdita's maternal instinct is a sexual awakening prompted by her love for Leslie. At this stage, it should be noted that Linton's narrator has not explicitly clarified whose

[216] Meem notes that Mr Brocklebank's comparison of Eva with 'the eastern odalisque doubled with Manon Lescaut' is a reference to the '[l]ighthearted prostitute' heroine of l' Abbé Prévost's *Manon Lescaut* (1731), p. 108.

child Lily was, and consequently it might be argued that Perdita's sexuality, which is couched in a socially acceptable context of maternity, is not intended to be representative of deviancy. The intensity of Perdita's response to Lily, however, is also disruptive, suggesting not only the manifestation of her culturally endorsed emergent female sexuality but also the arousal or 'excitement' of her (sexual) jealousy. The moment of Lily's unexpected introduction is a significant point in the novel's structuring of Perdita's relationship with Leslie. That is, Lily's appearance in the novel is the point of exchange between Perdita's 'overpowering desire to see [Leslie] again' and her discovery that 'there was a wife', which 'had come upon her with a feeling of surprise that was not all pleasant' (RF, pp. 136, 158). The ambiguity of Perdita's suddenly heightened maternal feeling therefore begins to undermine the sexual difference which defined her from Eva.

The uncertain distinction between the two sisters, however, collapses and is superseded by an instance of Perdita's replication of Eva's duplicitous flirtation with de Bois-Duval, which is necessarily mediated through the concealed exchange of missives. In her own pursuit of Leslie, whose wife's existence she has chosen to disregard, Perdita employs an equally duplicitous method to arrange a liaison with the chemist. In particular, Linton's heroine takes advantage of an invitation from Mrs Blount to attend a Women's Rights conference by orchestrating a meeting with Leslie. Ostensibly it would seem that the episode provides Linton with the opportunity to express her disdain for organised feminism, which she associated with lesbianism; namely, by juxtaposing an unrestrained satire of Bell's misanderous community of 'Shreikers' alongside an apparent endorsement of Perdita's heteronormative credentials. As Meem has argued, although Perdita finds Bell almost irresistible, Perdita is nevertheless 'essentially a man's companion, friend, and lover'.[217] That Linton's narrator describes the evening of the conference as 'a night for lovers' and 'not rapid speech' is therefore surely no coincidence (RF, p. 192). Linton's advocacy of her heroine is somewhat blemished, however, by the opportunism of Perdita's choice to meet Leslie where she 'knew' the conservative Mrs Crawford's 'presence […] was scarcely to be looked for' (RF, p. 184). In fact, Perdita disingenuously exploits both this knowledge and the older woman's affection to solicit Leslie's company by writing 'a little note to Mrs Crawford

[217] Meem, 'Introduction', *The Rebel of the Family*, p. 13.

begging her to go too' (RF, p. 184; my emphasis). The fervent plea to Mrs Crawford, however, is intended as 'a hint' to Leslie, which Perdita rightly believed his concerned but unwitting aunt would encourage him to act upon (RF, p. 184). Their meeting culminates with Leslie exacting a 'promise' from Perdita to remain 'patient' and not to give up hope of ever being 'well married and well cared for' (RF, pp. 194, 193). Although his remarks are generalised, having given her promise, Perdita is left with the 'feeling of having taken a vow and bound herself by an oath', although 'to what?', she was not certain (RF, p. 194). The scene, of course, is intended to be somewhat prophetic, gesturing towards Perdita's future acceptance of Leslie's proposal and the deferral of its disclosure until the bereaved Mrs Crawford 'can bear to hear' that Leslie was 'going to bring a new wife home' (RF, p. 380).Nevertheless, Perdita's response, given on an evening when she had disingenuously solicited Leslie's company, cannot completely obscure the implication that she has betrothed herself to a married man.

The figure of Leslie's own adulterous wife, however, is central to both consolidating the similarities of the two sisters. As a result of their clandestine relationships with Bois-Duval and Leslie, respectively, the two sisters (albeit inadvertently for Eva) are involved in a parallel process of attempting to replace Florence. Whilst not entirely analogous, the relationships that Eva and Perdita form with these two men closely anticipate those established by Florence. Florence's death, however, makes way for Perdita to take up her place as Leslie's wife. Yet Linton complicates the novel's companionate marriage plot, and in doing so definitively differentiates Perdita from both of her sisters. Whilst the novel concludes with Eva and Thomasina each contracting mercenary marriages, Perdita's own companionate marriage to Leslie is deferred beyond its end.

Conclusion

It is perhaps not unsurprising that as an antifeminist journalist who sympathetically depicted unorthodox and unconventional heroines in her novels that Linton and her literary work significantly complicate Marcus's arguments. In keeping with cultural ideals, for example, Linton signals the importance of elective female friendship for her isolated (and semi-autobiographical) heroine Perdita, in *The Rebel*. Nevertheless,

her novel depicts female friendship at best as only ever being compensatory for the dearth of female amity within the family home and, in particular, between sisters. However, Linton's novel prompts us to re-evaluate the absence of sisterhood in *Between Women* and to recognise that her fictional juxtaposition of female amity and sororal intimacy was part of a broader social discourse that promoted sisterhood as the primary bond between women and, importantly, one that allowed for the expression of hostility. The contradictions between Linton's social life and her literary work also prompt us to reconsider Marcus's confident claims that long term same-sex partnerships between women were comfortably accommodated by respectable Victorian society and regarded as analogous to companionate heterosexual marriage. Linton herself was certainly not averse to socialising with a number of prominent feminists and independent women, such as Matilda Hays or Harriet Hosmer, both of whom Marcus and Vicinus claim to have established long term sexual relationships with other women. Yet Linton's journalism and, not least her disparaging portrait of Bell Blount in *The Rebel*, stop well short of promoting female marriage as a viable alternative to or appropriate revisionary model for heterosexual matrimony.

Conclusion

Inspired by and greatly indebted to the work of Sharon Marcus, this thesis has re-examined the significance of a variety of same-sex female bonds in Victorian literature and culture from a critical perspective liberated from the previously dominant paradigms of marginalisation and/or transgression. However, whilst primarily maintaining the principal historical claim made in *Between Women* regarding 'the particular indifference of Victorians to a homo/hetero divide for women', and upholding its overarching argument that female homosocial desire represented an integral part of mainstream middle-class feminine identity, the findings of this research demonstrate that Victorian ideals and beliefs regarding the nature and purposes of same-sex female bonding were of a more discriminating or disparate character than has been acknowledged in Marcus's study (BW, p.13). By broadening my analysis, for example, beyond (Marcus's somewhat restricted reference to) Sarah Ellis to include other widely read discourses relating to the ideals of feminine conduct and women's same-sex relationships this thesis presents a more nuanced understanding of the important distinctions made by some Victorian commentators regarding the intimacy of adolescent girls, adult women, and sisters. In addition, by highlighting the heterogeneity of the middle classes, and the significance of economic circumstances as a determining factor of women's status within this dominant social sector, important consideration has been given to the same-sex relationships formed by some of those middle-class women who were displaced from their conventionally assigned roles within the realm of domesticity. As has been noted, Marcus's misreading of middle-class identities has led her to overlook the significance of female homosocial desire outside of the contexts of family and marriage. As a result, therefore, of providing a corrective to Marcus's misinterpretation, critical attention has been brought to bear upon other contexts or environments in which, as I have contended, it is evidenced that culturally endorsed ideals of female intimacy, whilst remaining important, were nevertheless disrupted, transformed or renegotiated. Consequently, by identifying instances of dysfunctional or problematic relationships between women this thesis also addresses a further oversight of *Between Women* by exploring the extent to which 'Victorian society's investment in […] compulsory homosociability and homoeroticism for women' may have been contested or subject to opposition (BW, p.61). What has therefore

become apparent in this research, and which (other than the apparent 'exception' of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*) remains absent from Marcus's reading of Victorian same-sex female relationships, are voices of ambivalence or contradiction.

As is evidenced in my final chapter, the most conspicuous voice of dissent appears to be that of Eliza Lynn Linton. In fact, when situated within Marcus's compelling argument that a number of 'female marriages' established by prominent feminists were not only culturally accommodated but also regarded as viable models for the development of egalitarian and contractual heterosexual marriage, Linton's antifeminist journalism appears to be particularly anomalous. Linton, however, was not alone in expressing concerns regarding the potential disruption posed to the heterosexual economy by adult women who chose to live with other women rather than men. Fellow archconservative Sarah Ellis, for instance, had argued that exclusive long term bonding between two women threatened to undermine their supposedly predestined future as wives and mothers. Thus, whilst Linton's vehement refusal to sanction female marriage cannot be regarded as providing any conclusive or definitive evidence of a broader consensus of opposition, given the similar concerns expressed by Ellis, Linton's opposition is nevertheless suggestive that Marcus's arguments regarding the widespread social acceptance and esteem of female marriage are overstated.

Linton's novel, however, also complicates Marcus's analysis of female amity and disregard of sisterhood. Whilst extolling the virtues of 'true friendship' as exemplified by the celebrated Ladies of Llangollen in her article 'The Ethics of Friendship', and signalling the importance of elective female amity to Perdita, the isolated and marginalized semi-autobiographical heroine of *The Rebel of the Family*, Linton nevertheless expressed little confidence in the widespread existence of same-sex female friendship. Her pessimistic estimation of the prevalence of animosity between women, however, was also shared by other Victorian commentators who similarly remarked upon an apparent dearth of female amity. Indeed, accounts of flawed female bonding are central to Dinah Mulock Craik's *Olive*. To a certain degree, however, Craik's depiction of her heroine's unreciprocated ardent attraction to the unworthy Sara Derwent might be seen to indirectly correspond to Marcus's argument that the importance of female friendship was demonstrated, if not promoted in the Victorian novel's 'plot of female amity', wherein companionate

marriage is shown to have been predicated upon and consolidated a sustained friendship between two women. Notably, in Craik's novel, Sara is punished with premature death by the author who had elsewhere endorsed adolescent female homoeroticism as an important prelude to heterosexual marriage. By contrast, Linton's *The Rebel* portrays elective female bonds as compensatory for the absence of amity between sisters. The cultural significance afforded to relationships between Victorian sisters is, however, dismissed in Marcus's study, and yet, as my research has shown, Linton's apparent underinvestment in ardent female friendships and her advocacy of the primacy of sororal bonding was echoed elsewhere by other prominent contemporaries, such as Sarah Ellis and Charlotte Yonge.

Although this analysis fundamentally concurs with arguments made previously by Helena Michie, Michie's understanding is nevertheless shown to be somewhat incomplete. Read from within the theoretical framework of poststructuralism, Michie's account of Victorian literary and cultural constructions is limited to complementary dyadic sisterhood and therefore fails to fully consider how Victorians conceptualised the relationships of more than two sisters. For Charlotte Yonge, as has been observed, triadic childhood sisterhood was an exclusionary bond which prompted one marginalised sibling to establish an alternative and consolatory companionship with a friend. Notably, according to Linton's novel, the exclusionary and predominantly unfriendly dynamics of triadic adult sisterhood result in a marginalised sibling finding a husband. Although manifestly antagonistic, Linton's fictional portrait of sisterhood is nevertheless invested with the similar capacity of female friendship to generate companionate marriage. As an isolated example, Linton's fictional portrait cannot, of course, be viewed as providing a paradigm of more wide-held beliefs regarding the interdependence between sisterhood and marriage. It does, however, correspond, and therefore confirm, more generally other contemporaneous discourses that invested sororal bonds with a greater esteem than female friendship.

The limited attention afforded to sororal bonds in Marcus's study, which has led her to negate its cultural importance, is compounded by the absence of any discussion of women's same-sex relationships in the workplace. The professional relationships of women writers, for instance, which were inevitably informed by ambition and competition, is absent from Marcus's analysis. Yet, as has been

discussed, in their attempts to validate their participation within a predominantly male governed literary marketplace these writers engaged themselves (both explicitly and implicitly) in a contested dialogue of conservative middle-class gender ideals.

The absence of any reflection upon the situation of working middle-class women in Marcus's study has also led to an incomplete reading of the same-sex female bonds depicted in Charlotte Brontë's (semi-autobiographically informed) novel *Villette*. That is to say, Marcus fails to consider the possible impact or influence that mainstream Victorian ideals of female homosocial desire may have had upon those women whose social status was undermined by having to undertake employment situated outside of the confines of domesticity. That the prejudices of social hierarchy impeded the development of same-sex female intimacy between employers and employees is beyond doubt. Harriet Martineau's comments were certainly meant to deter any governess from harbouring aspirations of forming bonds of friendship with her employer. But attempts were made by some Victorian working middle-class women, including Brontë. Whilst admittedly the author had been unsuccessful in repeating the success experienced by Miss Weeton who, earlier in the century, appears to have founded a mutual attachment with Mrs Pedder, Brontë's correspondence nevertheless evidences a wish to form a bond of amity with her own female employer, Mrs Sidgwick. Marcus's indifference to the social circumstances of some working middle-class women, however, has resulted in a failure to consider the significance of Lucy Snowe's intimate relationships with her two female employers in Brontë's *Villette*. Echoing perhaps, to certain degree, the earlier experiences of Miss Weeton and Mary Wollstonecraft, Brontë's novel, as I argue, presents the hierarchical working relationships of female employee and employer as effective (if not valid) opportunities for some Victorian women to form intimate homosocial and, in particular, homoerotic bonds.

This thesis has also engaged with Marcus's claims regarding culturally endorsed homoerotic practices of female objectification and display. Whilst Marcus offers a compelling argument to suggest that these practices, incited in part by the dissemination of fashion iconography, were regarded by Victorians as acting in consort with ideals relating to middle-class women's roles as wives and mothers, my own research has shown that Victorians attributed different meanings to the

scopophilic relationships of middle-class women. Linton and Ellis, for instance, regarded the association of fashion and the female gaze as significantly detrimental to the relationships of middle-class women. Indeed, Linton argued that the female gaze was utilised as a weapon to safeguard or police boundaries within the middle classes. In a more detailed analysis, however, my research has demonstrated that Dinah Mulock Craik's novel, *Olive*, promotes the female objectification of women as means of surveillance and instrumental in regulating the emergent heterosexual desire of adolescent girls.

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